

via email: contacto@presidencia.gov.co Excmo. Sr. Presidente Iván Duque Márquez President of the Republic of Colombia	via email: despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co Sr. Fiscal General Fabio Espitia Garzón Attorney General of Colombia
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September 1, 2019

Dear Sirs:

We are very disturbed by the recent intensification of threats and attacks against **Isabel Zuleta**, spokesperson for Movimiento Ríos Vivos (MRV), **Milena María Flórez**, Vice-President of MRV, and **William de Jesus Gutierrez**, President of the Association of Fishermen and Miners in the municipality of Valdivia in the Cauca River region of Antioquia Department.

MRV comprises 15 associations and families in the Cauca River Region affected by the negative environmental and human rights impact of the hydroelectric project, Hidroitungo. The project, which is directed by Public Enterprises of Medellín-EPM, impacts more than 300,000 people in 27 municipalities; they were not consulted when the project was initiated in 2009. Opponents point to untold damage to the riverbed and disruption of agriculture and fishing.

In the last few weeks, people have been questioning Isabel Zuleta's relatives about her past and her private life. Civil servants and public figures of Ituango municipality have insulted her for "opposing development" and for being a "bad leader." She has previously been a victim of surveillance, death threats, and criminalization. Protection measures granted by the National Unit of Protection (Unidad Nacional de Protección, UNP) have been insufficient.

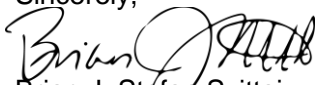
William de Jesus Gutierrez, who leads the Technical Committee of the Hidroitungo Project, is responsible for reporting on the stability of the project. He has been the victim of constant surveillance, likely because he regularly denounces the link between the armed conflict and the construction of the dam. Incidentally, his own home was destroyed by an avalanche produced by the project.

Milena María Flórez was forced to flee the country temporarily because of repeated criminalization and selective attacks. Other MRV members have been deliberately excluded from meetings related to the mega-project and have been banned from entering the mayor's office in Valdivia. Nevertheless, they are persistent in demanding an independent technical analysis to determine the safety level of the hydroelectric project. Although the National Disaster and Risk Management Unit has stated that the project is safe, no other Colombian authorities seem willing to corroborate this assessment.

For several years, MRV members and their families have suffered multiple violations of their rights, including death threats, smear campaigns, intimidations, and killings (cf our letters from 2018: May 11, May 26, Oct 21, Nov 12). Even the governor of Antioquia has made a number of public statements against MRV. Therefore, we strongly urge that you

- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into threats and surveillance against Isabel Zuleta and William de Jesus Gutierrez, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- take all necessary measures to ensure that existing protection measures offered by UNP effectively guarantee the physical and psychological security of Isabel Zuleta and other MRV members
- grant the request of MRV to carry out an independent investigation regarding the safety of the project

Sincerely,


 Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinator


 Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

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
 Soledad García Muñoz, Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural, and Environmental Rights – 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

09/03/19_FrontlineDefenders_Colombia

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