

<p>via email: contacto@presidencia.gov.co <b>Excmo. Sr. Presidente Iván Duque Márquez</b> President of the Republic of Colombia</p>	<p>via email: despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co <b>Sr. Fabio Espitia Garzón</b> Attorney General of Colombia</p>
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October 24, 2019

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply disturbed by the increasing number of assassinations of indigenous social leaders throughout Colombia. We urge that you investigate the killings of the following four persons.

Cauca Department

Oct 13: **Toribio Canas Velasco**, 53 years old, was ambushed and killed by masked assailants while he was with friends in the zone of Toribío. A recent United Nations report on the peace process characterizes the human rights situation facing indigenous communities in north Cauca as “dire.” The UN High Commissioner in Colombia recently said that 36 indigenous activists had been murdered in north Cauca in 2019, while at least 53 others have received death threats.

Nariño Department

Oct 13: **Lilia Patricia García**, who worked as secretary of the Awá Indigenous Cabildo of Watsalpi, was shot dead while walking along a village road to the education institute Los Telembies, which was founded for child victims of forced displacement. Armed groups are highly active in the area. She was shot from behind by an unidentified attacker. Lilia, age 43, was married to the governor of the indigenous reserve. The couple’s 15-year-old son was murdered in 2015 after resisting attempts by Rastrojos paramilitaries to forcibly recruit him. The family was displaced from their home as a result.

La Guajira Department

Oct 17: **Oneida Epiayú**, an indigenous Wayuu activist, was shot dead while eating lunch in a restaurant in Riohacha, the capital city of La Guajira. Oneida Epiayú had been vocal in denouncing corruption in government welfare departments. Thousands of Wayuu children have died in the last decade from preventable diseases, malnutrition and dehydration. Communities blame abysmal living conditions on government neglect.

Quindío Department


Oct 17: **Constantino Ramírez Bedoya**, an Embera-Chamí indigenous leader, was found dead with a number of gunshot wounds. He was a committee member in a regional organization which advocates indigenous rights and autonomy.

The National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) reports that that between August 2018 and August 2019, at least 97 indigenous activists were murdered in Colombia. Many of the killings are linked to land disputes as indigenous communities resist paramilitaries and other armed groups entering their territories, which are often rich in natural resources and coveted by business interests.

**We strongly urge you to:**

- investigate thoroughly and impartially the murders of these four indigenous social leaders, publish the results, and bring the assailants to justice;
- meet with leaders of ONIC to discuss protection mechanisms for indigenous leaders throughout the country

Sincerely,

  
Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordiators

  
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  
Antonia Urrejola, Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email  
US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email  
US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Gonzalez, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

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