

<p>via email: <a href="mailto:contacto@presidencia.gov.co">contacto@presidencia.gov.co</a> <b>Excmo. Sr. Presidente Iván Duque Márquez</b> President of the Republic of Colombia</p>	<p>via email: <a href="mailto:despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co">despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co</a> <b>Sr. Fiscal General Néstor Humberto Martínez Neira</b> Attorney General of Colombia</p>
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January 25, 2020

Dear Sirs,

We are writing to express our concern about the ongoing human rights crisis facing the communities of Bojayá in Chocó Department. We are particularly concerned about death threats to **Leyner Palacios**, a human rights defender from Bojayá who has been outspoken against the presence of illegal armed groups in the area.


We wrote to you last month (cf our letter Dec 25 2019) about the continuing threats from the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the paramilitary Gaitanistas Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC) to the indigenous and Afro-descendant communities of Bojayá. The Colombian Office of the Ombudsman, several ethnic-territorial organizations in Chocó, and the Catholic Diocese of Quibdó have all reported that ELN and AGC armed groups operating in Bojayá, have caused at least 2,250 people to live under forced confinement and life-threatening risk. There are tight restrictions on access to healthcare, food, water, and communication.

As a survivor of the Bojayá Massacre in 2002, Leyner Palacios has become an outspoken social leader and, as a consequence, has suffered reprisals, including death threats. Since 2002, the communities of Bojayá have suffered serious human rights violations, including forced displacement and mass killings by paramilitary groups and the army. On December 31, 2019, the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace denounced that 300 members of the AGC arrived at the Bojayá communities of Pogue, Corazón de Jesús, Loma de Bojayá and Cuia, placed them under forced confinement, and threatened to kill them if they tried to resist. On January 3, 2020, they threatened Leyner Palacios, warning him to leave Bojayá or he would be killed.

We **strongly urge** that you

- immediately put into effect a comprehensive plan, with the participation and agreement of the affected communities, that gives effective and urgent access to basic services and guarantees the communities' protection against any attacks from armed groups.
- consult with Leyner Palacios to provide him with protective measures, in strict accordance with his wishes
- take immediate action to break up paramilitary groups, in accordance with the commitments made by the government and recommendations from international organizations.

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  
José Hernández García, Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email, US mail  
Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons of African Descent, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email, US mail  
Antonia Urrejoa, Rapporteur for Colombia and Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Persons, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email, US mail  
Amnesty International, Urgent Alerts ~ via website  
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Gonzalez, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email  
01/03/20\_UA169/19update\_Colombia

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