

<p>via email: asuntosdefensor@defensoria.gov.co <b>Carlos Alfonso Negret Mosquera</b> National Ombudsperson of Colombia/ Defensor del Pueblo</p>	<p>via email: despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co <b>Sr. Francisco Barbosa Delgado</b> Attorney General of Colombia</p>
--	---

June 22, 2020

Dear Ombudsperson Negret and Attorney General Barbosa,

We are writing to demand the release of six campesino men from Mapiripán, Meta Department, who were unjustly arrested in a joint operation carried out June 7-8 by “an elite body of the police with the support of the Colombian Air Force and in coordination with the Attorney General of the Nation,” according to Defense Minister Carlos Holmes Trujillo.

The campesinos arrested are **Carlos Julio Betancourt Flores, José Isidro Martín Barreto, Carlos Julio Diaz, José Vicente Hernández, Norbey de Jesús Bustamante Cardona, and Luis Alberto Méndez**. They are longtime residents and well-known members of several rural zones around Maripán. Five of the men are enrolled in the National Comprehensive Plan to Replace Crops for illicit use (PNIS), a crucial program that provides a path for farming families who currently grow coca to gradually and voluntarily transition to other crops.

The Community Action Councils of the rural zones in which these campesino men reside (El Silencio, Nueva Esperanza, Buena Vista, and Puerto Alvira) demand their immediate release. We echo that demand. We also share their outrage that the joint operation to arrest these six men began after the Office of the Ombudsman issued an Early Alert that was intended to protect social leaders.

We are also disturbed that Defense Minister Holmes Trujillo has alleged that the six men belong to a residual organized armed group and are the authors of “forced displacement and threats against social and community leaders, and the substitution of illicit crops in both Meta and Guaviare.” Their families and community members strongly deny such accusations and are concerned that the government is constituting a new case of judicial “false positives.”


These men are not working against the PNIS crop substitution program; they are part of it. Despite its overwhelming success, PNIS is being actively undermined by millions of dollars of Colombia governmental funding to security forces to forcibly eradicate coca in the name of the “War on Drugs” and commit human rights abuses in the process. More than 50 members of COCCAM (National Coordinator of Cultivators of Coca, Poppy, and Marijuana), one of the leading organizations of farmers active in the program, have been killed since the Peace Accords were signed in 2016 (cf our letters of Jan 26 2020, July 1 and July 26 2019, Jan 26 and May 25 2020).

We are concerned for the physical health of these six men as well as their civil liberties. After their arrest, they were transferred to the prison in Villavicención, where 886 inmates have been infected with the COVID-19 coronavirus. As of June 17, their exact whereabouts were unknown to their families.

We strongly urge that you

- immediately release all six men and drop any bogus criminal charges
- repair damages to community infrastructure and property incurred during the arrest operation, including the El Divino Niño school in the village of El Silencio
- conduct a thorough review of the investigation that led to the arrest of these six men, including disciplinary investigations into those who ordered and conducted the arrest, and disclose any irregularities

Sincerely,

  
Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinators

  
Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Excmo. Sr. Presidente Iván Duque Márquez, President of the Republic of Colombia ~ via email  
Alicia Arango Olmos, Minister of the Interior of Colombia ~ via email  
Francisco Santos Calderón, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via email  
Kristin Farrell (Human Rights Officer) and Mariel Chatman (Vulnerable Populations Specialist), US Embassy in Colombia ~ via email  
Christine Russell, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Dept ~ via email  
Antonia Urrejola, Rapporteur for Colombia, Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Persons, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email, US mail  
CONPAZ: Red Comunidades Construyendo la Paz en Colombia ~ via email  
FOR Peace Presence ~ via email  
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Gonzalez, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

17 June\_FORPeacePresence\_Colombia

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