

<p>Excmo. Sr. Presidente Iván Duque Márquez President of the Republic of Colombia contacto@presidencia.gov.co</p>	<p>Sr. Fiscal General Francisco Barbosa Delgado Attorney General of Colombia despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co</p>
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March 13, 2021

Dear Sirs:

We are concerned for the safety of church leaders who are speaking out against the continued armed violence in Colombia. We are especially concerned that **Bishop Ruben Dario Jaramillo**, the bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca Department, is receiving death threats. The bishop told a radio journalist on March 3 that he received a death threat via WhatsApp and was warned he could become the victim of a bomb attack.


Dozens of illegal armed groups are active along the Pacific coast because of the region's strategic importance for cocaine exports. In Buenaventura, residents are terrorized by turf wars between factions of criminal groups. In the radio interview during which he publicly disclosed the death threat against him, Bishop Ruben Dario Jaramillo said that "some powerful groups in Buenaventura are upset that people talk about things that are happening here."

We are concerned paramilitaries are succeeding in seizing control over several districts of Buenaventura because the local security forces are complicit in allowing them to do so. The paramilitary groups are trying to impose their control in the city through fear, various extortionist tactics, and advertising what they call a "social cleansing" in the city. In the process, they are forcibly recruiting youth. The ongoing violence in Buenaventura is a clear example of how impunity for paramilitary actors threatens the true possibility of peace.

We strongly urge that you

- improve efforts to quell the armed violence in the region, as requested of your government on March 4 by fourteen Catholic bishops from the Pacific region
- carry out a thorough and impartial investigation into all threats and acts of intimidation against Bishop Ruben Dario Jaramillo, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- if requested, provide protection measures for Bishop Ruben Dario Jaramillo, in accordance with his wishes
- immediately finalize the National Commission on Security Guarantees' public policy for dismantling armed groups and their networks

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator


Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Francisco Santos Calderón, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via email, US mail
IACHR: Antonia Urrejola Noguera, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email, US mail
UN: Juliette De Rivero, Representative in Colombia of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ~ via email
US Embassy: Kristen Farrell (human rights) and Mariel Chatman (vulnerable populations) ~ via email
US State Department: Christine Russell, Desk Officer for Colombia ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email
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: