

<p><b>Excmo. Sr. Presidente Iván Duque Márquez</b> President of the Republic of Colombia <a href="mailto:contacto@presidencia.gov.co">contacto@presidencia.gov.co</a></p>	<p><b>Sr. Fiscal Francisco Barbosa Delgado</b> Attorney General of Colombia <a href="mailto:despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co">despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co</a></p>
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November 25, 2021

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply distressed about the violence waged by ESMAD police (Mobile Anti-Disturbance Squadron) against environmental defenders in the rural community of La Hermosura, Bolívar municipality, Santander Department, on November 13. **Michelsen Vargas Velasco**, a 31-year-old local farmer, was shot in the head and died from the injury.


Residents had been protesting against an oil pipeline for the past 50 days. The community of mostly rural workers had been complaining to ECOPETROL that the pipeline was contaminating their water supply and that construction was tearing up the roads. On November 13, they blocked access to a road in Puerto de los Cerros. ESMAD arrived and attacked the community, firing tear gas and rubber bullets. (A video of the confrontation between the protesters and ESMAD was released by the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers Collective on November 14.)

After the police approached Michelsen Vargas, he turned to walk away. The police shot him in the head at close range, an officer trampled him, dragged him towards the patrol car and handcuffed him. As the police drove away, others who were detained in the patrol car begged the police to provide first aid. The police passed two nearby towns where they could have treated him (Peñón and Bolívar) and proceeded to the farthest town (Vélez). In the car, Michelsen Vargas was vomiting and dripping blood from his ears and nose. After being taken to Vélez, he was transferred to a health center in Tunja, where he died.

We strongly urge that you

- conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the ESMAD attack on residents of La Hermosura that resulted in the killing of Michelsen Vargas Velasco, publish the results, and bring the perpetrators to justice
- approach community leaders to construct a dialogue between ECOPETROL and the residents
- respect the right of lawful and peaceful assembly and protest

Sincerely,

  
Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinator

  
Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

copies: Francisco Santos Calderón, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via email, US mail  
Daniel Palacios Martínez, Minister of the Interior ~ via email  
IACHR: Antonia Urrejola Noguera, Rapporteur for Colombia and the Rights of Indigenous Persons, 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, 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:**