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| <p>Excmo. Sr. Presidente Iván Duque Márquez President of the Republic of Colombia contacto@presidencia.gov.co</p> | <p>Sr. Fiscal Francisco Barbosa Delgado Attorney General of Colombia despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co</p> |
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March 23, 2022

Dear Sirs:

We are writing today to demand respect for the freedom of assembly and protest, particularly for those organizing in defense of the environment. In Santander Department on February 15, **environmental defender Linda Oneida Suárez Sánchez received** a threatening text message warning her that she had better remain silent, or else she would end up murdered. We urge you to take action to end threats and potential violence toward environmental defenders like Linda Oneida Suárez Sánchez who have taken leadership roles in the movement against fracking and oil drilling.

Linda Oneida Suárez Sánchez is a teacher and environmental defender from Santander Department and founder of the departmental chapter of Resistance to Mining and Extractivism. She is connected to the national coordination of the Colombia Free of Fracking Alliance, where she accompanies communities in opposition to fracking projects in the Magdalena Medio region. She has also led exchanges for the rescue of traditional and peasant knowledge towards a just energy transition.


On February 19, members of communities in opposition to a fossil fuel extraction project of the Ecopetrol oil company attended a hearing with the environmental license authority ANLA in El Carmen de Chucuri, Santander Department. While community members saw this as an opportunity to come to a peaceful agreement with Ecopetrol, it could also generate more risk to environmental defenders. Retaliation against outspoken movement leaders is common, especially in light of the significant presence of illegal armed groups in the Magdalena Medio region. In a press conference two days later, the Colombia Free of Fracking Alliance denounced threats and acts of intimidation against its members. Since the formal start of the pilot fracking projects in January 2020, ten threats against seven Alliance members have been recorded.

Opposition to Ecopetrol extraction projects has resulted in continuous threats. In 2018, a colleague of Linda Oneida Suárez Sánchez was murdered without serious investigation. In 2019, she herself received threats via text, audio, and social media networks after organizing and protesting against fracking. In February of this year, at least three women who oppose fracking have been threatened. They warn of Ecopetrol's threats to water, life and territory, human and other animal livelihoods, natural ecosystems and their ability to provide traditional medicines.

We strongly urge that you

- investigate the threats against Linda Oneida Suárez Sánchez, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- provide protection measures for leaders of the movement against fracking, including Linda Oneida Suárez Sánchez, in strict accordance with their wishes
- order Ecopetrol to end its statements that stigmatize movement leaders with false accusations
- guarantee open democratic civic engagement of your citizens that includes public assembly and free expression

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator


Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Francisco Santos Calderón, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via email, US mail
Daniel Palacios, Minister of the Interior ~ via email
Joel Hernández García, 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 and US Representatives Beatty, Brown, 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: