

Excmo. Sr. Presidente Iván Duque Márquez President of the Republic of Colombia contacto@presidencia.gov.co	Sr. Fiscal Francisco Barbosa Delgado Attorney General of Colombia despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co
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March 25, 2022

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply saddened to learn of the assassinations of social leaders **Jorge Tafur** and **Teofilo Acuña Ribón** in the Magdalena Medio region. On February 22, armed men dressed in military gear arrived at the house where they were staying in a rural area of San Martín, Cesar Department, camouflaged by the darkness of the night, and shot them dead.

Jorge Tafur and Teofilo Acuña Ribón were active in several social movement organizations, including the Agro-mining Federation of the South of Bolívar (FEDEAGROMISBOL), the Inter-dialogue Commission of the South of Bolívar, Center and the South of Cesar (CISBCSC), the People's Congress, the National Agrarian Coordinator (CNA), the Agrarian, Peasant, Ethnic and Popular Summit (CACEP), and others. Jorge Tafur was a trade unionist and member of the leadership team of CAN. Teofilo Acuña Ribón, president of FEDEAGROMISBOL, had been leading dialogue tables with the national government to generate rural development agreements. Both were outspoken against threats to land rights of campesinos and artisanal (traditional) miners. The expansion of fossil fuel drilling (fracking) and palm tree plantations (for palm oil) pose threats to both land security and the environment.

The two men were staying last month in the community of Puerto Oculto, municipality of San Martín, Cesar Department, accompanying a process to recover land taken by violence. They had recently denounced that the police and the mayor of San Martin were colluding with a local landowner in making threats and harassing the victims of violence in the region. It was there that they were assassinated on the night of February 22.

According to Indepaz (Institute for the Studies of Development and Peace), at thirty-three social leaders have been killed in 2022. With 138 social leaders killed in 2021—and more than 1,300 since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016—Colombia remains the deadliest country in the world for human rights defenders.

We strongly urge that you

- conduct and thorough and impartial investigation into the assassination of Jorge Tafur and Teofilo Acuña Ribón, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- provide protection measures for social movement leaders in the Magdalena Medio region, in strict accordance with their wishes

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinators

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
 CACEP/Congreso de los Pueblos ~ via email
 CPT: Community Peacemaker Teams-Colombia ~ 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:

