

<p><b>Excmo. Sr. Presidente Gustavo Petro Urrego</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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September 23, 2022

Dear Sirs:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force, are deeply distressed over the assassination of teacher and social leader **Sandra Patricia Montenegro** in the municipality of Palmira in Valle de Cauca Department on September 3. She was teaching sports classes on the soccer field in Guanabanal township when she was shamelessly shot at least five times in front of her students. Sandra Patricia Montenegro held a position at the Institute of Sports, Physical Education, and Recreation of Valle del Cauca (Indervalle) as a sports monitor. She was also active in various sectors of social leadership in the municipality, such as the Community Action Board (JAC) and the city council. She died hours later at a health center.


Thankfully, none of the students were harmed in this targeted assassination, due at least in part to their own ability to hide from the bullets and the hitmen. These children were born into a war-torn country and this is peacetime? Assassinating social leaders in front of children shows the disregard for life the hit men and intellectual authors of this crime have for children's well-being and the future of Colombia. This perpetuates children's trauma. The public nature of the crime attacks the role of education to create leaders in a democracy and strikes fear into all other public servants and laborers.

The Ombudsman's Office issued an alert warning of the possible increase in violence against social leaders, as well as human rights defenders, by illegal armed groups in the area. According to the Institute of Studies for Development and Peace of Colombia (Indepaz), the murder of Sandra Patricia Montenegro makes 125 social leaders murdered this year; at least 1,352 social leaders have been assassinated in Colombia since the signing of the 2016 peace agreement.

The ruthlessly public assassination of Sandra Patricia Montenegro illustrates the impunity for violence against those who work to realize a peaceful and democratic Colombia. Because we are deeply concerned by the assassination and the lack of information about previous death threats and the lack of responsibility taken for her death by known armed groups in the area, we urge the Colombian authorities to:

- carry out a thorough and impartial investigation into **Sandra Patricia Montenegro's** assassination, publish the results, and to bring those responsible to justice, in accordance with international standards;
- guarantee that all human rights defenders, in particular, Afro-descendant, indigenous, and sexual minority rights defenders, are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of restrictions or reprisals in Colombia.

Sincerely,

  
Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinator

  
Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Luis Gilberto Murillo, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via email, US mail  
Alfonso Prada Gil, Minister of the Interior ~ via email  
Joel Hernández García, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) ~ via email, US mail  
Julissa Mantilla Falcón, Rapporteur on the Rights of Women, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) ~ via email, US mail  
UN: Juliette De Rivero, Representative in Colombia of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ~ via email  
US Embassy: Francisco Palmieri (Chargé d'Affaires, ad interim); Kristen Farrell (human rights); 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:**