

Excmo. Sr. Presidente Gustavo Petro Urrego 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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January 25, 2023

Dear Sirs:

Mariela Reyes Montenegro, a union leader, was assassinated on January 2 in the town of Santander de Quilichao, Cauca Department, while visiting some fellow employees in the Morales Duque de Santander neighborhood of Quilichao. According to Yeferson Rodríguez, secretary of the municipal government: "The information we have is that it was an attack directed at her; witnesses indicate that the subject shot her from behind and then fled the site on a motorcycle [operated by another individual]."

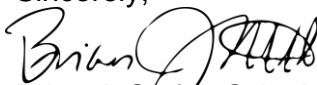
Her killing was denounced by The National Union of Workers and Employees of Public Services, Information Technologies, Communications, Television, Autonomous Corporations, and Decentralized and Territorial Institutes of Colombia (SintraEmsdes). According to SintraEmsdes, Mariela Reyes Montenegro worked for more than 20 years at Quilichao Public Services, was a leader in the union sub-directorate, and performed functions in the women's secretariat of the union. The local union chapter said she was a staunch defender of workers' and women's rights.

Several illegal armed groups are known to be operating in the region, including: FARC dissident factions Columna Móvil, Dagoberto Ramos and Jaime Martínez; ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional); Segunda Marquetalia; AGC (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia), Águilas Negras, and EPL (Ejército Popular de Liberación). The Ombudsman's Office has issued Early Alerts 019/22 and 048/19 for Santander de Quilichao. The area, which is crossed by the Pan-American highway, is a strategic location for violence and illegal acts due to its interconnection of rural and urban areas.

There needs to be an end to the continuous targeting and assassinations of social leaders. Therefore, we urge you to take the following actions:

- conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the assassination of Mariela Reyes Montenegro, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- implement protection measures for social leaders in Cauca Department, in strict accordance with their wishes
- investigate any assassination plots against other union and social leaders in Santander de Quilichao

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator


Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

copies: Alfonso Prada Gil, Ministro del Interior ~ via email
Luis Gilberto Murillo, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via email, US mail
Joel Hernández García, Rapporteur for Colombia, 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); Sandra Lee (human rights); Mariel Chatman (vulnerable populations) ~ via email
US State Department: Christine Russell, Desk Officer for Colombia ~ via email
US Senators from Ohio: Brown & Vance ~ via email
US Representatives from Ohio: Balderson, Beatty, Brown, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

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The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: