

<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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February 25, 2023

Dear Sirs:

We are writing to denounce the assassination of **José Antonio Santiago Pérez**, president of the Community Action Board (Junta de Acción Comunal) of Socuavo Norte in the municipality of Tibú, Norte de Santander Department. He had recently been elected to serve as the delegate from Norte de Santander to the Federation of Community Action Boards. On February 4, José Antonio Santiago Pérez had just left a meeting with his community when he was intercepted by armed individuals who killed him in the village of La Serena, five minutes from Tibú. He was traveling by motorcycle because the armored van assigned to him under the security mechanism of the National Protection Unit (UNP) was stolen in November of last year.

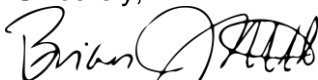
His life had been threatened on previous occasions. On June 11, 2019, while he was traveling on his motorcycle in the T25 village of Tibú, he was attacked and received three bullet wounds, including one in the head. Since the attack, he and the bodyguards assigned by the UNP have been continuously receiving a series of direct threats and phone calls. The threats materialized when, on December 25, 2021, he and his security team were attacked while traveling on a main road in Socuavó North. As a result, José Antonio Santiago Pérez fled with his wife and youngest son to Cúcuta. They lived there for a short time until he decided to return to his homeland of Socuavo Norte, where he was born, grew up and developed his leadership.

The region is dangerous for social leaders, where several illegal armed groups are active, led by the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia). In the past two years, there have been at least 13 assassinations of social leaders in Norte de Santander Department. The Human Rights Ombudsman's Office had issued the follow-up report No. 014/22 of the Early Alert 050/20 for the municipality of Tibú, where it points out that "the risk scenario lies in the inoperability and failures in the implementation of the Peace Agreement" of 2016. According to Indepaz (Institute for the Studies of Development and Peace), such inoperativeness "has not allowed overcoming critical, historical, and structural problems that are evidenced in the high rates of vulnerability of leaders, social leaders, and peace signatories."

In order to end the continuous targeting and assassinations of social leaders, we urge you to:

- conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the assassination of **José Antonio Santiago Pérez**, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- implement protection measures for social leaders in Norte de Santander Department, in strict accordance with their wishes
- investigate any assassination plots against other social leaders in Norte de Santander

Sincerely,

  
Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordínators

  
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 and US Representatives from Ohio: Balderson, Beatty, Brown, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

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