

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

May 24, 2023

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply distressed over recent attacks on the staff of CREDHOS (Regional Corporation for the Defense of Human Rights), an organization committed to the defense, promotion, and protection of human rights in the Magdalena Medio region of Colombia since 1987. In recent months there has been an increase in threats and harassment to social organizations and human rights defenders in the Magdalena Medio region and in Barrancabermeja, Santander Department, in particular.

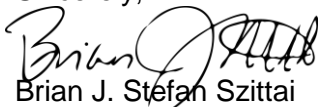
On April 10, a bomb was placed outside the CREDHOS office in Barrancabermeja. Police suspected it was placed there by members of the National Liberation Army (ELN). One day later, armed civilians shot at CREDHOS staff while they were accompanying an administrative police procedure in the area known as "Finca El Hebron" in Barrancabermeja. Also present were two members of International Action for Peace (IAP) from Spain, who were providing international accompaniment to the CREDHOS staff. The IAP members were clearly identified as international peace companions with vests indicating their peaceful role. It is our understanding that the National Police captured two of the assailants, charged them, and released them on April 13.

We are deeply concerned for the safety of CREDHOS staff, who have been victims of threats and attacks for many years. A few years ago, the AGC paramilitary organization AGC (Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces) circulated a pamphlet in Barrancabermeja with a list of targets they accused of colluding with the government and left-wing armed rebels. The list included at least two leaders of CREDHOS. AGC stated that they would bring them back "chopped up in plastic bags."

We urge the Colombian authorities to:

- carry out a thorough and transparent investigation into the attacks on CREDHOS staff, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice, in accordance with international standards
- include in the investigations any patterns of victimization towards human rights defenders committed by irregularly armed civilians presumably organized in "citizen security fronts"
- provide CREDHOS and its staff with effective individual and collective protection measures, in strict accordance with their wishes
- prevent further violence by guaranteeing that all human rights defenders and all international peace observers, including CREDHOS and IAP, 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: Augusto Rodríguez Ballesteros, Director de la Unidad Nacional de Protección (UNP) ~ via email
Luis Fernando Velasco Chaves, 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
CREDHOS: Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos ~ via email
US Embassy: Francisco Palmieri (Chargé d'Affaires, ad interim); Sandra Lee (human rights) ~ via email
US State Department: Christine Russell, Desk Officer for Colombia ~ via email
Amnesty International - Urgent Action Network ~ via web contact form
US Senators from Ohio: Brown & Vance ~ via email
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: