

<p>Excmo. Sr. Presidente Gustavo Petro Urrego President of the Republic of Colombia contacto@presidencia.gov.co</p>	<p>Sr. Fiscal Francisco Barbosa Delgado Attorney General of Colombia despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co</p>
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August 22, 2023

Dear Sirs:

We are writing with concern about the attacks and difficult working conditions of the unions that make up **REDSIPAZ**, (Red de Organizaciones Sindicales para la Defensa de lo Público y la Paz, or Trade Union Network for the Defense of Peace), who are working to implement Colombia's peace process. The government needs the full participation of members of REDSIPAZ to implement the Total Peace Plan that was announced by President Petro in August 2022. The Total Peace Plan is a multifaceted effort that seeks to minimize violence, protect civilians, and dismantle the many armed groups operating in Colombia.

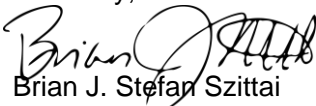
Since May, members of the **SINDHEP** union (Sindicato de Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos de la Defensoría del Pueblo) have been excluded from union contract negotiations with the government. Carlos Ernesto Camargo Assis, the Defensor del Pueblo (Ombudsman for Human Rights), had been illegally intercepting private communications of union workers in his own office, and then he expelled the SINDHEP union from the negotiation table (cf our letter 23 June 2023). These are employees in the Ombudsman's office who are expected to defend the human rights of people in the communities and organizations that the Ombudsman serves. The employees' exclusion from negotiations is unacceptable.

Another union, **Memoria Viva** (Sindicato Nacional Memoria Viva de los Trabajadores de la Seguridad y Protección del Pueblo, or National Union Living Memory of People's Security and Protection Workers) has been at odds with its employer, the National Protection Unit (UNP, Unidad Nacional de Protección). Its members are mostly former combatants and signatories of the Peace Accords. Their work is to protect social leaders as bodyguards. They have repeatedly reported that many of the vehicles and other means of protection are not adequate, and when they malfunction, they are not replaced, which puts the lives of the protected persons and their escorts at risk. This has resulted in situations of enormous risk with injured people and even homicides, such as that of Ronald Rojas in Huila, murdered on July 3 when Memoria Viva's escort was not provided with a working vehicle and other means of security necessary for his protection.

With vast experience as human rights defenders, REDSIPAZ members can make important contributions to the Total Peace Plan by strengthening relations with civil society in their work with social leaders, ex-combatants, Indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant communities. We therefore urge that you:

- allow the participation of representatives of the Memoria Viva Union and other unions of REDSIPAZ as part of the teams developing public policies related to Total Peace
- ensure that all employees of UNP, including members of the Memoria Viva Union, are given the necessary resources, such as vehicles in good condition, to adequately ensure the safety of those who are in their care
- instruct Ombudsman Carlos Camargo Assis to reinstate SINDHEP to the negotiation table

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
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
US Senators from Ohio: Brown & Vance, and US Representatives from Ohio: 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: