

<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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January 13, 2024

Dear Sirs:

We are writing with concern for the safety of leaders of the **SINDHEP** labor union (Sindicato de Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos de la Defensoría del Pueblo). The National President of SINDHEP, **William Salazar Valencia**, and Vice-President of SINDHEP, **Ana Rosa Fuentes Potes**, have been subjected to death threats.

Since May 2023, members of the SINDHEP union have been excluded from union contract negotiations with the government. Carlos Ernesto Camargo Assis, the Ombudsman for Human Rights (Defensor del Pueblo), 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 letters 23 June 2023 and 22 August 2023). As leaders of SINDHEP, William Salazar and Ana Rosa Fuentes Potes filed two criminal complaints against Carlos Camargo Assis. One complaint was the alleged use of the Digital Evidence Forensic Laboratory equipment to spy on union workers (and use the illegally obtained communications against them). The other complaint was the alleged criminal responsibility of Carlos Camargo Assis in the cover-up and omission of responsibilities for a legal case when he was a magistrate of the National Electoral Council.

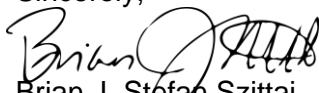
It was a few weeks after the second criminal complaint filed by SINDHEP that William Salazar Valencia received a death threat via WhatsApp accompanied by a photo taken of his son on the street. The message made it clear that the threat was related to his filing the formal complaint against Carlos Camargo Assis.

The death threats are the most extreme component of a strategy of anti-union and anti-democratic violence being conducted by the Office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights. Public statements from the Ombudsman's Office against SINDHEP have sought to discredit the union. The smear campaign has caused dozens of SINDHEP members to resign from the union, for fear of reprisals or hidden messages from directors of the Ombudsman's Office calling for them to disaffiliate from the union. This conduct seriously undermines the right to freedom of association and the constitutional right of union association.

We strongly urge that you

- investigate threats made against SINDHEP leaders, especially William Salazar Valencia and Ana Rosa Fuentes Potes, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice
- adopt appropriate measures to protect SINDHEP members and directors, in accordance with their wishes
- work to restore the dignity and mission focus of the Office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights
- instruct Ombudsman Carlos Camargo Assis to reinstate SINDHEP to the negotiation table

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinators


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
José Luis Caballero Ochoa, 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, 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: