

<p>Excmo. Sr. Presidente Gustavo Petro Urrego President of the Republic of Colombia contacto@presidencia.gov.co</p>	<p>Sra. Luz Adriana Camargo Attorney General of Colombia despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co</p>
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June 22, 2024

Dear President Petro and Attorney General Camargo:

We are writing with concern for the safety of human rights defender **Alberto Yepes Palacio**, coordinator of the Observatory of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (ODHDIH), which is operated by the Colombia–Europe–United States Coordination (CCEEU). A recent theft of work documents is renewed evidence of a persistent pattern of espionage, harassment and intimidation of the work of the CCEEU and of Alberto Yepes Palacio.


During the early afternoon of May 31, Alberto Yepes Palacio was meeting at a restaurant in Bogotá with delegates of social organizations and human rights defenders of the Central Node of the CCEEU when three people stole his backpack containing his work computer, which contains sensitive information related to cases of human rights violations. Security camera footage shows that the perpetrators (two men and a woman) arrived in a high-end red car, entered the building and distracted the front desk security staff, took an elevator to the restaurant, entered and grabbed the backpack. Two fled down the stairs and the other took the elevator. They met on the first floor and went outside to take the same vehicle that was waiting for them at the front sidewalk.

Because of his legitimate work in defense of human rights, Alberto Yepes, on a recurring basis, has been subjected to different types of attacks that include threats, attempted entry into his home, surveillance via drones, and theft of his belongings. In 2017, he and his daughter were threatened by the Black Eagles paramilitaries (as well as by agents of the Colombia Armed Forces) as retaliation for their participation in the Roundtable on Extrajudicial Executions, which implicated the commander of the National Army in human rights violations. In 2021, CCEEU wrote to officials in Colombia to denounce several incidents of espionage against Alberto Yepes over a two-month period. A cell phone with a tracking device was hidden in the protection vehicle assigned him by the National Protection Unit (UNP). Another data transmission device (GSM/PILLAR B) was discovered behind a panel at the passenger’s seat of the UNP vehicle. A remote-controlled drone encircled the building where the CCEEU has offices. And on the day of a scheduled meeting of the Roundtable Table on Extrajudicial Executions, a woman was seen outside taking photos of the building, intentionally directing the camera towards the third floor where the office is located.

To help guarantee his safety, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) issued precautionary measures for Alberto Yepes Palacio in 2017; Colombia’s own Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) did the same. But despite his timely reporting of incidents to authorities, there has been no known progress in the judicial investigations. We therefore urge that authorities in Colombia:

- investigate the theft of work documents belong to Alberto Yepes Palacio, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- ensure that the government has put an end to any clandestine and illegal activities conducted by government intelligence agencies
- follow the multiple recommendations of international organizations to identify, prosecute, and punish any persons responsible for acts of intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders; in particular, give priority to Constitutional Court order (Sentence SU-546 of 2023) that declared the State of Things Unconstitutional

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator


Christine L. Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Luis Gilberto Murillo Urrutia, 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
CAJAR: Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear Restrepo / José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective ~ via email
US Embassy: Francisco Palmieri (Chargé d’Affaires, ad interim); Adam Levy (human rights) ~ via email
US State Department: 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

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