

<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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May 25, 2026

Dear President Petro and Attorney General Camargo:

We are writing with concern over the murders of Milton Penagos and Edwar Rubiano Álvarez, two social leaders who were both killed on April 22, 2026. Now, at least 46 social leaders have been murdered in Colombia in 2026.

Milton Penagos was a union leader and public official from Sandtander de Quilichao in northern Cauca Department. He was in charge of planning for the public services company Emquilichao, a former secretary to the mayor, and vice president of the Sintraemquilichao union. He was murdered in his home on April 22 under unknown circumstances.


Edwar Rubiano Álvarez, age 34, was a leader of the Micay Canyon Peasant Association and president of the Community Action Board of the Los Tigres village in northwest Cauca. His body was found on a rural road between El Estanguillo and La Fonda in the municipality of El Patia on April 22. Rubiano was promoting organizational processes with cocoa farmers, seeking the voluntary substitution of illicit crops in one of the most conflict-ridden areas of southwestern Colombia.

The risk to human rights defenders and community leaders in the department is exacerbated by the presence of armed groups such as the “Iván Mordisco” dissident faction of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army), which are vying for control of territory and the illegal economy in the region. It is suspected that Edwar Rubiano Álvarez was actually alias Jimmy, a member of the “Iván Mordisco” armed group. This might have allowed him to gain influence in the Micay Canyon, a region strategically important for drug trafficking. He also held the position of secretary of the El Tambo Farmers' Association, from where, according to military intelligence, he encouraged the population's participation in protests and blockades that ultimately hampered Army operations.

We urge authorities to

- (1) investigate the killings of Milton Penagos and Edwar Rubiano Álvarez, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- (2) consult with community organizations to implement appropriate security measures for the civilian communities of northern and northwestern Cauca

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

copies: Daniel García-Peña Jaramillo, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via email
José Luis Caballero Ochoa, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) ~ via email
UN: Scott Campbell, Representative in Colombia of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ~ via email
US Embassy: Jarahn Hillsman (Chargé d'Affaires); Adam Levy (human rights) ~ via email
US State Department: Desk Officer for Colombia ~ via email
US Senators from Ohio: Husted and Moreno and US Representatives from Ohio: Beatty, Brown, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Rulli, Sykes ~ via email

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