

Human Rights Cases at a Glance: Summary of letters written by IRTF in response to urgent human rights abuses

On behalf of our 190 Rapid Response Network members, **IRTF volunteers wrote and sent six letters each month** to government officials in these countries, with copies to officials in the US. See the letters at <http://www.irtfcleveland.org/content/rm> or ask us to mail you hard copies.

By signing our names to these crucial letters, human rights crimes are brought to light, perpetrators are brought to justice and lives are spared. Our solidarity is more important than ever. Together, our voices do make a difference.

Trends in Fall 2019

COLOMBIA

targets: indigenous and Afro-descendant leaders, labor organizers and trade unionists, former FARC members active in reintegration into civilian society (as designated by the 2016 Peace Accords), journalists, national strike participants, and environmental and land rights defenders

EL SALVADOR

targets: journalists, women's and reproductive rights defenders

GUATEMALA

targets: indigenous communities (their allies, their lawyers) defending land, environmental, and cultural rights in opposition to hydroelectric, mining, and other mega-development projects

HONDURAS

targets: journalists, protesters in the street and those monitoring protests, indigenous communities (plus their allies, their lawyers) organizing resistance to mega-development projects, labor movement and union leaders

MEXICO (in the southern, mostly indigenous states)

targets: indigenous and environmental defenders

COLOMBIA

- Sep 1 surveillance, slander, and attack against **Isabel Zuleta, Milena María Flórez, y William de Jesus Gutierrez**, environmental activists and human rights defenders in their community around the Cauca River.
- Sep 24 death threats to **FECODE**, the (Federation of Education Workers), the largest trade union in Colombia, and its leadership including **Nelson Alarcón, Martha Alfonso, Domingo Ayala**, and **Carlos Rivas**, Bogotá.
- Sep 25 assassination of three more ex FARC combatants, **Milton Urrutia Mora, José Milton Peña Pineda**, and **Jackson Mena**, Norte de Santander and Chocó departments.
- Aug 2 forced displacement of 200 families by paramilitary groups. Some residents are being caught in the crossfire; some have died, Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca Department.
- Aug 26 unauthorized and nonconsensual surveillance of **Danelly Estupiñan**, a leader of the **Black Community Process (PCN)**. This letter also concerns the report that there was a transaction made exchanging money for the assassination of Danelly, Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca Department.

- Sep 1 unauthorized and nonconsensual surveillance, slander, and attacks against **Isabel Zuleta**, **Milena María Flórez**, and **William de Jesus Gutierrez**, environmental activists and human rights defenders resisting the development of a hydroelectric project, **Hidroituango**, in their community around the Cauca River.
- Sep 24 death threats to **FECODE** and its leadership -including **Nelson Alarcón**, **Martha Alfonso**, **Domingo Ayala**, and **Carlos Rivas**- in a pamphlet circulated by the Black Eagles (Águilas Negras) paramilitary group.
- Sep 25 assassination of three more ex **FARC** combatants, **Milton Urrutia Mora** (Cúcuta), **José Milton Peña Pineda** (Cúcuta), and **Jackson Mena** (Quibdó). Additionally **Arsenio Maldonado** was badly injured in the same attack that killed Milton and José, Cúcuta, eastern Colombia, Quibdó, Chocó region.
- Oct 24 assassinations of four indigenous social leaders: **Toribio Canas Velasco** (Cauca Dept), **Lilia Patricia García** (Nariño Dept), **Oneida Epiayú** (La Guajira Dept), **Constantino Ramírez Bedoya** (Quindío Dept).
- Nov 13 violent attacks on several indigenous people in less than a week in the **Nasa Tacueyo** reservation in Corinto, Cauca Department. Twelve were murdered, an assassination attempt on another, and others injured.
- Nov 15 burning of the boat and outboard motor belonging to journalist **David Torres** in Simití in Bolivar Department in an attempt to silence his critical reporting.
- Nov 26 killing of student demonstrator **Dilan Cruz** who was hit by tear gas canister thrown by riot police on November 23. He died from head injuries two days later, Bogotá.
- Dec 22 assassinations of three people during this time of national strike: a former FARC member, **Manuel Santos Yatacue**, the mayor of Sutatausa, **José Humberto Rodríguez**, and a community leader from Cases Grandes which was a FARC stronghold during the conflict, **Elicerio Mendoza**.
- Dec 23 nonconsensual surveillance against members of **dhColombia**, a human rights defense organization. Surveillance includes stalking, information and communication theft, and death threats made towards these community leaders.
- Dec 25 threats made by the National Liberation Army (ELN) and Gaitanistas Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC) towards the indigenous and afro-descendant communities in the municipality of Bojayá.

EL SALVADOR

- Oct 23 re-criminalization of **Evelyn Hernández** after judge declared her innocent in August. This was following her two-year detention for a complication in her pregnancy, which resulted in a stillbirth, originally deemed an infanticide by the court.
- Dec 24 slander charges and an exorbitant fine on **Lissania Zelaya** of **Amorales Collective**, both of whom are being persecuted for “slander” in their condemnation of acts sexual harassment and assault by University of El Salvador faculty member, Ricardo Mendoza.

GUATEMALA

- Dec 26 intent by Escobal mine to ignore a 2018 court ruling forbidding the creation of the mine without consultation with the Xinka community, the ancestral keepers of the land on which the mine sits.

HONDURAS

- Sep 22 assassination of **Edgar Joel Aguilar**, an outspoken and critical television reporter who would often report on both regional and national crime and corruption, Nueva Arcadia Municipality, Copán Department.
- Sep 23 death threats, intimidation, and attempted extortion of TV reporter **Miguel Ángel Tróchez**. Targeted for his controversial and pointed reporting style in response to crime in the Santa Barbara Department.

- Sep 26 the unjustified arrest of and attack against **Elizabeth Medina** and **Katherin Cruz Cerrato** who were monitoring peaceful protest on behalf of their human rights defense organizations in Francisco Morazán Department.
- Oct 1 criminalization of **María Concepción Hernández**, member of the Board of Directors of **ADEPZA** (the Association for the Development of the Zacate Grande Peninsula) and land and environmental rights defender, protecting the land and beaches of Zacate Grande, Valle Department.
- Oct 22 attempted assassination of **Sandra Maribel Sánchez**, anchor and journalist for **Radio Progreso**, targeted because of her critical reporting on government affairs.
- Oct 25 criminalization of social protest and detention of those defending human lives, property, freedom, and the physical environment. This includes 15 political prisoners who continue to be held for trumped up charges.
- Oct 26 assassination of five women leaders and members of **Garífuna** communities (and two men) since early September: **Mirna Teresa Suazo Martínez** (Masca beach, Cortés Department), **Gilma Antonia Cacho** and her five-year-old daughter, **Fiori Amaya Cacho** (Santa Rosa de Aguan, Colón Department), **Nayda Reyes Jiménez** and her **husband** (Puerto Cortés, Cortés Department), **María Digna Montero** (Iriona, Colón Department), **Óscar Francisco Guerrero Centeno** (Triunfo de la Cruz, Atlántida Department).
- Nov 12 attempted assassination of union leader **Jaime Atilio Rodríguez**, a former president of the College of Teachers of Middle Education of Honduras (COPEMH).
- Nov 14 assassination of journalist **Buenaventura Calderón**, killed by armed gunmen in front of his house on November 1. His wife was also killed in the attack in Puerto Lempira.

MEXICO

- Nov 11 disappearance of **Arnulfo Cerón Soriano**, a Nahua indigenous lawyer of the La Montaña region in Guerrero.
- Dec 1 assassination of **Arnulfo Cerón Soriano**, a Nahua indigenous lawyer of the La Montaña region in Guerrero.

Rapid Response Network

human rights cases at a glance

SEP-DEC 2019			COMPARISON SEP-DEC 2018	
		COUNTRIES		%
10	42%	Colombia	9	38%
9	38%	Honduras	8	33%
1	4%	Guatemala	5	21%
2	8%	Mexico	1	4%
2	8%	El Salvador	0	0%
0	0%	Nicaragua	1	4%
24	100%	total	24	100%
TARGETED GROUPS				
7	24%	indigenous/peasants/land rights	10	33%
2	7%	Afro-descendant groups	2	7%
4	14%	human rights lawyers/defenders/observers	2	7%
2	7%	workers' rights	2	7%
2	7%	women's rights	1	3%
0	0%	LGBT rights	0	0%
1	3%	student/youth rights	1	3%
3	10%	environmentalists: opposing mines, highways, dams	9	30%
5	17%	journalists/community radio	3	10%
0	0%	political candidate/political office-holder	0	0%
2	7%	community leaders/political activist	0	0%
0	0%	migrants/ migrant rights	0	0%
1	3%	other	0	0%
29	100%	total	30	100%
TYPES OF ABUSE				
6	1%	death threats	12	16%
34	6%	assassinated (or otherwise killed)	12	16%
1	0%	forced disappearance/suspected assassination	0	0%
0	0%	tortured (but not killed)	0	0%
0	0%	hit/beaten/assaulted	12	16%
3	1%	attempted assassination: shot at/stabbed (not killed)	1	1%
5	1%	threatened/attempted assault	0	0%
4	1%	surveilled/followed/intimidated	8	10%
21	4%	criminalization of protest: illegal search,arrest,detention,conviction	23	30%
500	87%	forced evictions/seizure of communities by armed groups(# of families)	0	0%
0	0%	police attacks on groups/illegal raids	4	5%
0	0%	burglary, ransacked office/home	1	1%
0	0%	kidnapping/attempted kidnapping	1	1%
1	0%	tamper with car	0	0%
1	0%	food crops destroyed	0	0%
0	0.0%	press/broadcast equipment destroyed	0	0%
1	0%	defamatory statements/misinformation campaign	2	3%
0	0%	medical attention denied	0	0%
0	0%	conscientious objector status denied	0	0%
0	0%	homes/encampments burned down	1	1%
577	100%	total	77	100%