

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 Winter 2020: January - March

COLOMBIA

targets: indigenous leaders, labor organizers and trade unionists, campesinos, former FARC members active in reintegration into civilian society (as designated by the 2016 Peace Accords), journalists, prison inmates, and community and social leaders.

EL SALVADOR

targets: journalists.

GUATEMALA

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

HONDURAS

targets: journalists, indigenous and afro-indigenous communities (plus their allies, their lawyers) organizing resistance to mega-development projects, labor movement and union leaders, and campesinos.

NICARAGUA

targets: political and social leaders, and women's rights defenders.

COLOMBIA

- Jan 25 death threats to **Leyner Palacios**, a human rights defender from Bojayá who has been outspoken against the presence of illegal armed groups in the area. This reflects an ongoing human rights crisis facing the communities of Bojayá in Chocó Department.
- Jan 26 assassinations of **more than 20 social leaders** this month. These include ex-combatants who are part of the reincorporation process and farmers who are part of the crop substitution program. We echo the statement by the United Nations Security Council on January 15 which characterizes this as "a grave situation of security" and demands that the Colombian government take "effective actions" to stop these egregious crimes against social leaders.
- Feb 24 violent kidnapping attempt by a group of 10 heavily armed men, wearing national army and national police uniforms against **Yesid Conda Pacho**, a leader of the Nasa indigenous community in Silvia municipality in Cauca Department.
- Feb 26 harsh treatment by the military against conscientious objector **Brayan Stiven Gonzáles Blanco**.
- Mar 21 assassination of **Didian Arley Agudelo**, age 38, former city councilor and head of farmer organizations. His body was found with his hands bound and shirt around his neck. His body was discovered in a zone controlled by the Seventh Division of the Army, four days after he went missing. (Antioquia Dept.)

- Mar 21 assassination of **Amado Torres**, age 49, treasurer of the community council of La Miranda. Armed men in military clothes entered his home, took him by force to a remote location, and shot him in the skull with a rifle at point-blank range. (Antioquia Dept.)
- Mar 21 assassination of **Julio Gutiérrez Avilés**, founder of the local Association of Rural Workers and president of the community council in El Esmero. Walking home to his farm, he was intercepted by unknown individuals, who shot him repeatedly, killing him immediately. (Huila Dept.)
- Mar 22 written threat by paramilitary group **Águilas Negras** (Black Eagles) against members of **Justapaz** (Mennonite Association for Justice, Peace and Nonviolent Action).
- Mar 23 the Colombian Armed Forces killed 23 inmates when they used indiscriminate gunfire at La Modelo prison in Bogotá on March 22. La Modelo inmates had joined with prisoners across the country who were holding simultaneous protests against unhealthy conditions, overcrowding, and lack of protections against the COVID-19 coronavirus.
- Mar 24 assassination of **Ivo Humberto Bracamonte Quiroz**, online news director. Puerto Santander, Norte de Santander Department.
- Mar 24 assassination of **Marco Rivadeneira**, campesino leader, Puerto Asís, Putumayo Department.
- Mar 24 assassination of **Angel Ovidio Quintero González**, President of the City Council of San Francisco, Antioquia Department.
- Mar 24 assassination of **Omar and Ernesto Guasiruma**, Embera indigenous leaders, Bolívar, Valle del Cauca Department.

EL SALVADOR

- Jan 12 smear campaigns, public discreditation, and retaliation against **journalists** by government agencies for exercising their right to freedom of expression and opinion (e.g., canceling printing or advertising contracts).

GUATEMALA

- Feb 23 unjust arrest and detention of **Julio Gómez Lucas**, a leader of the Maya Chuj community of San Mateo Ixtatán and a member of the Peaceful Resistance of the Microregion of Ixquisis, for false criminal charges of incitement to commit crimes, participation in illegal gatherings of armed persons, protests, assault and attempted murder.
- Feb 25 attempted break-in at the home of human rights lawyer **Esteban Celada**, a member of the Group of Litigators against Torture in Latin America (*Grupo de Litigantes contra la Tortura en América Latina*), an initiative led by lawyers from 10 Latin American countries, who work to combat the systematic use of torture in the region.

HONDURAS

- Jan 11 forced disappearances and assassinations of indigenous community leaders **Santos Felipe Escobar** (Olancho Department) and **Efraín Martínez** (Francisco Morazan Department).
- Jan 21 false criminal charges against **Moises Sánchez**. Tomorrow in court, Moises faces the possibility of 30 years in prison on charges related to the usurpation of private land to build a community access road, likely in retaliation for his labor union activity on Fyffes melon farm (Choluteca Department).
- Feb 1 assassination of **Karla Ignacia Piota Martínez**, a Garifuna community member and the 70-year-old sister of Amada Piota Martínez, a Garifuna spiritual leader and member of the governing board of OFRANEH (Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras), Cortéz Department.
- Feb 22 staggering number of homicides in Honduras in 2020, including victims of torture. By January 13, ninety-eight homicides were already registered.
- Feb 22 murder of **José Leopoldo Navarro**, a 60-year-old campesino, whose body was found with signs of torture on the banks of the Tocoa River in Colón Department
- Feb 22 murder of **Humberto Hidalgo Niño**, age 23, and his niece, **Auri Michelle Rivera Dubón**, age 18, in Copán Department.
- Feb 22 murder of **Edwin Amílcar Mairena**, a moto-taxi driver, age 28, in Francisco Morazán Department.

- Mar 25 police and military crackdown on the Honduran population during this health crisis. We understand that more than 500 people have been arbitrarily detained.
- Mar 26 Journalist Paola Cobos and her cameraman were physically pushed aside by police in Tegucigalpa while they were trying to document police detention of two individuals. The police also damaged their recording equipment.
- Mar 26 assault on journalist **Yesking Mairena** who was slapped by a soldier in Sabá (Colón Dept) and was restricted from reporting on the military's detention of residents there.

NICARAGUA

- Jan 24 attack on son and nephew of **Reyna Rodríguez Palacios**, an active member of **MAM** (Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres de Nicaragua) and a recently elected Political Council member to the Blue and White National Unity Party.

Rapid Response Network

human rights cases at a glance

JAN-DEC 2019		COMPARISON JAN-DEC 2018	
		COUNTRIES	%
8	44%	Colombia	11 61%
6	33%	Honduras	1 6%
2	11%	Guatemala	0 0%
0	0%	Mexico	3 17%
1	6%	El Salvador	2 11%
1	6%	Nicaragua	1 6%
18	100%	total	18 100%
TARGETED GROUPS			
9	33%	indigenous/peasants/land rights	8 28%
0	0%	Afro-descendant groups	1 3%
0	0%	human rights lawyers/defenders/observers	2 7%
2	7%	workers' rights	3 10%
1	4%	women's rights	1 3%
0	0%	LGBT rights	3 10%
0	0%	student/youth rights	0 0%
0	0%	environmentalists: opposing mines, highways, dams	0 0%
4	15%	journalists/community radio	2 7%
1	4%	political candidate/political office-holder	0 0%
6	22%	community leaders/political activist	9 31%
0	0%	migrants/ migrant rights	0 0%
4	15%	other	0 0%
27	100%	total	29 100%
TYPES OF ABUSE			
2	0%	death threats	0 0%
152	23%	assassinated (or otherwise killed)	27 63%
0	0%	forced disappearance/suspected assassination	1 2%
0	0%	tortured (but not killed)	0 0%
4	1%	hit/beaten/assaulted	3 7%
0	0%	attempted assassination: shot at/stabbed (not killed)	6 14%
0	0%	threatened/attempted assault	1 2%
0	0%	surveilled/followed/intimidated	0 0%
502	75%	criminalization of protest: illegal search, arrest, detention, conviction	3 7%
0	0%	forced evictions/seizure of communities by armed groups(# of families)	0 0%
0	0%	police attacks on groups/illegal raids	1 2%
1	0%	burglary, ransacked office/home	0 0%
1	0%	kidnapping/attempted kidnapping	0 0%
0	0%	tamper with car	0 0%
0	0%	food crops destroyed	0 0%
1	0.2%	press/broadcast equipment destroyed	0 0%
2	0%	defamatory statements/misinformation campaign	1 2%
0	0%	medical attention denied	0 0%
1	0%	conscientious objector status denied	0 0%
0	0%	homes/encampments burned down	0 0%
666	100%	total	43 100%