

An Open Letter

**To the President of Colombia
To the Governments of the European Union, the
countries of Europe, and the United States
To Public Opinion**

October 13th, 2015

**Subject: Threats in Colombia: Serious Concern
regarding lack of guarantees**

The government of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC guerrilla movement recently announced that they had reached an agreement on the topic of Justice, one of the subject under discussion in their ongoing talks in Havana. This is an important step, allowing us to look forward with optimism to the possible signature of an agreement that will bring to an end the armed conflict between the Colombian government and the FARC guerillas after more than 60 years of war, we believe that this is a possibility that must not be lost. Furthermore, we hope that talks, leading to an eventual agreement, will soon be started with the ELN guerrilla movement.

At the same time, we see with grave concern that, although there is talk of peace, there are no safeguards for the activities of the social organisations that are working to defend social rights and to oppose an economic model that is deepening inequality and that violates fundamental rights. We observe that human rights defenders, leaders of social movements, parties of the Left, people who are trying to recover their land, and independent journalists continue to be the victims of threats, acts of harassment, attacks and assassinations that are perpetrated by paramilitary groups such as the Urabeños, the Rastrojos, Aguilas Negras or Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, and others.

As was noted in the latest report on attacks against human rights defenders from Front Line Defenders, in 2014 Colombia was the country where there were the most assassinations of human rights defenders, with a total of 42 victims. The “We are Defenders” programme has signalled

the fact that in the first 6 months of 2015 alone 399 acts of aggression were committed against human rights defenders and leaders of social movements; 34 human rights defenders were assassinated.

We particularly want to draw attention to the following recent incidents:

On October 6th, 2015, a threat signed by the paramilitary group Águilas Negras was sent to 8 people and 3 organisations. We want to stress the targeting of Eberto Díaz, member of Fensuagro and a leader of La Via Campesina International, and of several leaders and spokespeople of the Agrarian, Peasant, Ethnic, and Popular Summit, as well as of representatives of the trade union movement and social organisations, and independent journalists - including: Javier Betancourt, Andrés Gil, Carlos Ancízar Rico, Guevara Robert Daza, Jaime Cortez Suarez, la Guardia indígena, Prensa Rural, Julio Roberto Gómez, Jesús Elkin Rodríguez Moya and the CGT (General Confederation of Labour).

This is not a question of an isolated incident. At the end of September, a pamphlet was circulated bearing the signature of "the capital bloc of the águilas negras". The pamphlet contained threats against recognised communications media, but its main message concerned more than 100 members of social and human rights organisations, members of the office of the Mayor of Bogotá, and other people connected with local peace processes - all of whom were declared to be military targets.

To the foregoing must be added: assassinations, disappearances, and threats against social movement leaders in different regions of the country. These incidents raise the question as to whether the limited security measures offered by the government are sufficient or effective. Conversely, the incidents are evidence of the absence of safeguards for the essential work of human rights advocacy.

This situation confirms the existence of important anti-peace forces which want to maintain a state of permanent

conflict, in order to further their own interests. If these criminal groups, whether they be called paramilitaries or “bacrim” (criminal bands), are not disbanded and brought before the law – together with those members of the public security forces who maintain ties with them -- we are certain that they will become the seed from which renewed conflict will grow.

Only a Peace with guarantees of respect for human rights, and real guarantees for the work of social organisations in the defence of human rights, is a Peace with prospects of lasting. It is imperative that the Colombian State take decisive action and that it disband the paramilitary groups.

In addition, the international community of friends of the Colombian peace process: Governments, representatives of civil society, churches, and international organisations, must state firmly and clearly their opposition to the actions of these groups and their support for the legitimate and democratic activities of the different political forces and social movements. We invite the European Union, in accordance with its own commitment to human rights, to observe and accompany the work of human rights defenders in Colombia.

Signing Organisations :

Alianza por la Justicia Global
All Nepal Peasants' Federation
Alliance Against Hunger and Malnutrition
Amigos de la Tierra América Latina y el Caribe
Asociación Sindical de Trabajadores Bananeros Agricultores y Campesinos
Attac
Canadian Community Economic Development Network
Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos “Segundo Montes Mozo S.J.”
Centro Internazionale Crocevia
Conamuri
Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores/as de las Americas
Confédération Paysanne
Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias
Convergence globale des luttes de la Terre et Eau Ouest Africaine
Convergence malienne contre les accaparements de terres
Ecologistas en Accion
Ehne Bizkaia
Farmworker Association of Florida
Federación Agraria Argentina
FIMARC

FOS Andes
Fundacion Mundubat
Global Forest Coalition
GRAIN
Grupo Sur
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
México vía Berlin
MIJARC
Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les peuples
Plataforma Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo
Réseau Maghrébin d'Associations de Développement Local en milieu Rural
Sindicato Galego Labrego
SOA Watch Austin
Sociedad Cooperativa jitto bat nataka weria
SOLdePaz.Pachakuti
Solidaridad Suecia - America Latina
Unidad de la Fuerza Indigena y Campesina
Union Paysanne
Uniterre
World Forum of Fisher Peoples