

OIDHACO expresses grave concern regarding the killing of Human Rights Defenders and Social Leaders, as well as the increase in paramilitary activity

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The International Office for Human Rights – Action on Colombia (OIDHACO) expresses grave concern regarding the wave of violence perpetrated against human rights defenders (HRDs), social leaders and members of political movements during the first weeks of 2017, leaving at least 11 dead.

At the time of writing, OIDHACO was informed of the following killings:

- On 19 January, Messrs **Hernán Enrique Agámez Flórez, Marcelino Pastrana Fernández, Evertto Julio Quiñones Miranda** and **Fredys Cogollo Mora**, four rural farmers, were shot dead in the Department of Córdoba. Mr. Agámez formed part of the cocoa-leaf committee and had been exploring alternatives to cocoa cultivation in the region, while Mr. Cogollo was the son of the president of the Communal Action Board (JAC) in the village of El Salado.ⁱ
- On 17 January, the killing of Emilsen Manyoma and her husband Joe Javier Rodallega was reported. Their throats had been cut and they had been beaten, stabbed, and shot. Ms. Manyoma was a social leader in Bajo Calima and a member of the CONPAZ network. She had been working on a report on an armed structure in the Calima region, which allegedly operated with the complicity and tolerance of public institutions. Furthermore, Ms. Manyoma had reported human rights violations stemming from economic interests, in particular regarding large-scale development projects at the Buenaventura port, department of Valle del Cauca.ⁱⁱ
- On 10 January, Mr. Jose Yimer Cartagena Usuta was killed. He was the vice-president of the Rural Farmers Association for the Development of the Alto Sinú (ASODECAS) and member of the Marcha Patriótica (MP), a political and social movement. Mr. Cartagena had denounced the presence of paramilitary groups in the area and he, along with other members of ASODESCA, had been receiving threats since June, 2016.ⁱⁱⁱ Ten MP members, who attended the funeral of Mr. Cartagena, received threats afterwards.^{iv} Moreover, it is alarming that since its foundation in 2012, 128 MP members have been killed as a result of their political affiliation,^v and it is feared that a situation similar to the genocide perpetrated against the Unión Patriótica may occur, considering the level of instability in Colombia at present.
- On 9 January, Moisés and Chogoló Mosquera, a father and son, were killed close to the El Tamboral community in the Chocó department. Paramilitaries, who were present in the area approached Chogoló Mosquera, a member of the community council, and beat him to death. Upon hearing of his death, his father Moisés demanded an explanation from those responsible and they proceeded to shoot and kill him.^{vi}
- On 7 January, Aldemar Parra García, a rural farmer and social leader from the El Hatillo Community in the Department of Cesar, was shot dead. Mr. Parra was the president of the bee-keeping association in Cesar (ASOGRACE) and nephew of the president of the Communal Action Board (JAC). He had challenged the involuntary resettlements that were provoked by the expansion of coal mining activities in the region.^{vii}
- On 6 January, Olmedo Pito García was killed. He was part of the Huellas de Caloto - Nasa indigenous people's reserve, and a member of the Colombian National Coordination of Indigenous Peoples (CONPI), an organisation affiliated with the MP.^{viii}



These killings occurred within the context of increased paramilitary presence and activity, as denounced by the communities, who reported that these groups carry rifles, wear military style clothing, and identify themselves as members of the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC). Allegedly, they mobilise in groups of up to 300 men,^{ix} exhibiting a militaristic structure, and have established bases and transitory routes, securing territorial control of strategic zones and holding meeting with local communities. Graffiti has recently appeared with AGC initials in public places and flyers have been distributed carrying their name.^x Furthermore, a threat was reported by the Águilas Negras group warning that “we will not stop until we see a Colombia that is free of human rights defenders who disturb so much”.^{xi}

Despite the aforementioned situation, as well as the recognition by the United Nations of the permanent challenge that post-demobilisation groups pose in achieving peace,^{xii} the Colombian government, through an interview with the Minister for Defence, Luis Carlos Villegas, declared that “in Colombia there are no paramilitaries, to say that there were, would attribute political status to a few gangs dedicated to common and organised crime”. It is of huge concern that the government has not recognised the existence of paramilitary groups, and to date, has not provided the necessary security guarantees for human rights defenders and social and political leaders. Moreover, it is very worrisome that the Colombian state has not acknowledged the systematic acts of aggression perpetrated against human rights defenders. In contrast to what national and international social organisations have denounced, the Public Prosecutor’s Office stated publicly that such killings are “multi-causal” and that there is nothing to suggest that they are systematic in character.^{xiii}

Oidhaco calls on the Colombian state to:

- Implement as a matter of urgency point 3.4 of the Peace Agreement, which contemplates the creation of the National Commission of Security Guarantees, with the objective of dismantling paramilitary structures;
- Conduct conclusive investigations to uncover the truth regarding the aforementioned killings and bring to justice and sanction those responsible, guaranteeing that impunity does not prevail for violations perpetrated against human rights defenders and social leaders;
- Guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of all human rights defenders and social and political leaders, regardless of their political affinities.

Oidhaco calls on the European Union, its member states, and Switzerland and Norway to:

- Pay particular attention to the situation of risk faced by human rights defenders, social leaders and members of political movements at this time of instability, and call on the Colombian government to immediately guarantee their protection.

ⁱ Article published in *Semana* on 20 January 2017, available at: <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/asesinan-a-cuatro-integrantes-de-marcha-patriotica/512706>

ⁱⁱ Article published by *Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz* on 20 January 2017, available at: <http://jyp.megadatesystem.com/Urabenos-serian-responsables-del-asesinato-de-Emilsen-y-Joe>

ⁱⁱⁱ Article published by *Contagio Radio* on 11 January 2017, available at: <http://www.contagioradio.com/asesinado-dirigente-de-asodecas-jose-yimer-cartagena-articulo-34562/>

^{iv} HERNANDEZ CIFUENTES, Yhoban, “En Antioquia van 12 líderes asesinados. ¿Se repetirá la historia?” in *El Espectador*, 20 January 2017: www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/antioquia/antioquia-van-12-lideres-asesinados-se-repetira-histori-articulo-675870



^v RUBIANO, María Paula, "No cesa el fuego contra líderes sociales", in *El Espectador*; 27 November 2016, available at: <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/no-cesa-el-fuego-contra-lideres-sociales-articulo-667771>.

^{vi} Article published by Contagio Radio, 10 January 2017, available at: <http://www.contagioradio.com/paramilitares-choco-asesinato-articulo-34462/>

^{vii} Arbeitsgruppe Schweiz Kolumbien (ASK) Communique: <http://bit.ly/2jXFpP3>.

^{viii} Article published by *Prensa Rural*, 15 January 2017, available at: <http://www.prensarural.org/spip/spip.php?article20824>

^{ix} Article published by *Contagio Radio* on 23 December 2016, available at: <http://www.contagioradio.com/300-neoparamilitares-transitan-por-territorios-en-choco-sin-respuesta-del-estado-articulo-34022/>.

^x Article published by *Contagio Radio* on 20 January 2017, available at: <http://www.contagioradio.com/control-paramilitar-se-afianza-atrato-cauca-articulo-34925/>

^{xi} Ibid, Contagio Radio 20 January 2017.

^{xii} Report by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Colombia A/HRC/31/3/Add.2 2016 available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56ead1a64.html>

^{xiii} Article published by El Universal, 8 December 2016, available at: <http://www.eluniversal.com.co/colombia/bogota/fiscal-dice-que-no-hay-sistematicidad-en-asesinatos-de-defensores-de-ddhh-241980>

