

URGENT ACTION

ORGANISATIONS NEED PROTECTION AGAINST THREATS

On 1 February a “public statement” was issued on behalf of the “High Command of the Magdalena Medio Block” of the Gaitanist Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, threatening the lives of members of human rights, territory, land, and environmental defence organizations in the Magdalena Medio region of Colombia, including CREDHOS and FEDEPESAN. In January, another threat was issued, this time on behalf of the “Magdalena Medio Block of the FARC”, threatening the president of CREDHOS, among other human rights defenders. We call on the Colombian state institutions to provide timely and comprehensive protection to the threatened organizations.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Luis Fernando Velasco
Minister of Interior
Carrera 8 No. 7-83,
Bogotá DC, Colombia
X: @velascoluisf

Dear Minister,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the security situation of human rights, territory, land, and environmental defenders in Colombia, particularly those affiliated with the organizations Federación de Pescadores Artesanales Ambientalistas y Turísticos del Departamento de Santander – FEDEPESAN and Corporación Regional para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos – CREDHOS, located in the city of Barrancabermeja. We are deeply troubled to see that these organisations have received direct threats from armed groups operating in this region of the country, being declared a “military objective”, and further stigmatized as collaborators with other criminal groups in the area.

Amnesty International has documented the human rights defence work and the risk situation of these organisations since 2020. Despite public appeals and the presentation of our concerns, both in face-to-face meetings with authorities and through actions on social and digital platforms, these individuals and their communities continue to be attacked for defending their rights, and the state's response remains insufficient.

I urge you to exercise the utmost diligence in effectively fulfilling the Ministry of the Interior's duty to coordinate actions aimed at the comprehensive protection of individuals and organizations defending human rights. This includes protection measures provided by the National Protection Unit, the implementation of the collective protection policy established in the Decree 660 of 2018, the establishment of spaces for inter-institutional coordination and collaboration with civil society such as the Territorial Guarantees Table of the Magdalena Medio, coordination with local authorities (municipalities and governorates) responsible for emergency response and providing effective protection routes for individuals at risk, and collaboration with other state agencies such as the Ombudsman's Office and the Attorney General's Office for a comprehensive state response

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The **Magdalena Medio** is an extensive valley between the Colombian mountain ranges crossed by Colombia's main river, the Magdalena River. Petroleum is one of the major sources of economic activity in the region, where the country's largest refinery operates in the city of Barrancabermeja, Santander, at the heart of the Magdalena Medio. The area also engages in agro-industry, mining, livestock, among other economic activities. Due to its location and the abundance of valuable resources like oil and water, the region is considered strategic and has been the subject of continuous disputes between the State and armed groups present in the country. The Magdalena Medio has also been a stage for sustained processes of popular mobilization and human rights advocacy for decades. The combination of unions, feminist, popular movements, and human rights defence has created particularly strong scenarios of assertion and resistance. This, coupled with the dispute for territorial, political, and economic control of the region by interest groups and armed factions, has fostered a breeding ground for violence against human rights defenders that has persisted since at least the 1980s. In 2023, alarming figures of violence against the civilian population, especially homicides, were recorded in the Magdalena Medio. All of this unfolds in a context of the reorganization of at least four armed groups present in the region.

The Federation of Artisanal, Environmentalist, and Tourist Fishers of the Department of Santander (**FEDEPESAN**) carries out its work in the San Silvestre lake, in the vicinity of the city of Barrancabermeja. FEDEPESAN has reported water pollution by regional companies and the presence of criminal organisations engaged in drug and human trafficking. In this context, the president of FEDEPESAN, Yuly Velázquez, has experienced numerous forms of violence documented by Amnesty International, including a threat in November 2020, bullet impacts on her home in January 2021, intimidations during protest activities in August 2021, a firearm attack in May 2022, and another in July 2022 (resulting in an injury to a security guard of her protection scheme). In February 2021 Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action after serious threats against the vice-President of FEDEPESAN by the National Liberation Army – ELN. Amnesty International has documented deficiencies in the functioning of the protection scheme provided by the state through the National Protection Unit – UNP to Yuly Velásquez, due to her high level of risk.

The Regional Corporation for the Defence of Human Rights (**CREDHOS**), also based in Barrancabermeja, was founded in 1987 and has been accompanied by Amnesty International for several years. In the year 2000, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) issued precautionary measures to CREDHOS due to threats from paramilitary groups. In 2016, the Colombian Government's Victims Unit recognized CREDHOS as a subject of collective reparation for having suffered, as a collective, serious human rights violations in the context of the armed conflict.

Amnesty International has confirmed that the threats and victimization of individuals belonging to CREDHOS as a collective have persisted in recent years, in the context of the presence of armed organizations in the territory where it works. In April 2021 Amnesty International had already issued an Urgent Action asking for the protection of CREDHOS, due to serious threats suffered by its members at the time. The protection currently provided by the state is insufficient for the level of collective threat that CREDHOS has been experiencing during the last years.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish. You may also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 09 April 2024

NAME: CREDHOS & FEDEPESAN

PREVIOUS UA: N/A