

URGENT ACTION

PREVENT DISPLACEMENT OF FISHERS' COMMUNITY

On 15 February, the fishers' association FEDEPESAN announced that they feel forced to carry out a collective displacement from the lakes and rivers surrounding the city of Barrancabermeja, Colombia. In recent years, including the first two months of 2025, FEDEPESAN members have been subjected to numerous instances of harassment, threats, robbery, extortion, and even attempted murder by armed groups seeking control of the waters to their own benefit, or in retaliation for denouncing potential cases of pollution and corruption affecting the environment. We call on the National Police to guarantee the safety of FEDEPESAN members and prevent their forced displacement.

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

General Carlos Fernando Triana
Director of the National Police
Carrera 59 26-21 – CAN
Bogotá DC, Colombia
E-mail: lineadirecta@policia.gov.co
X: @PoliciaColombia

Dear Mr. Director,

I am writing to express my deep concern about the risks faced by the members of the Federation of Artisanal, Environmentalist, and Touristic Fishermen and Women of Santander (FEDEPESAN), particularly those who carry out their fishing activities in the lake of Ciénaga de San Silvestre as well as the rivers Sogamoso and Magdalena, Caño San Silvestre, Caño Rosario, and Quebraza El Zarzal, in the Barrancabermeja area.

I am deeply concerned that, on 15 February 2025, the fishermen and women of FEDEPESAN announced that they felt forced to leave their territory due to the violent pressure they have endured for years—pressure that has included threats in 2025—and due to the lack of attention and protection from authorities.

FEDEPESAN members face multiple forms of harassment, including telephone and direct threats—sometimes for extortion, other times because they are seen as obstacles to armed groups seeking control of the region's lakes and rivers. Additionally, they have been attacked after denouncing water pollution or potential acts of corruption that undermine environmental policies in their territory. Under these circumstances, FEDEPESAN members fear going out to fish, leaving them unable to earn an income or provide food for their families. This situation threatens their fundamental rights, including the right to work, access to food, the right to their territory, and to their safety.

Considering the National Police's duty to maintain conditions that allow people to exercise their rights and freedoms, including those in the Magdalena Medio region, I urge you to take immediate and effective action to protect FEDEPESAN members and ensure their safety, through measures that must be planned, implemented and evaluated in consultation with FEDEPESAN's members and must privilege a human rights approach.

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 an area for sustained processes of popular mobilization and human rights advocacy for decades where unions, feminist organizations, popular movements, and human rights defence has come together to form a strong local civic space. 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. Alarming figures of violence against the civilian population, especially homicides, have been recorded in the last years in the Magdalena Medio. All of this unfolds in a context of fight between at least four armed groups present in the region, including the Ejército Gaitanista de Colombia (EGC), also known as AGC or Clan del Golfo, currently the biggest armed group of the country and with the wider regional control.

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 armed groups seeking control of the territory, including the water bodies. 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 June 2022 Amnesty International [issued an Urgent Action](#) asking the Government to protect FEDEPESAN. 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, and has [asked for better protection](#). Yuly Velásquez, [received the 2024 Human Rights Award](#) by Amnesty International in Germany.

In [February 2024](#), [March 2024](#) and [January 2025](#) Amnesty Internacional has issued urgent actions asking the authorities to provide protection and carry out effective judicial investigation after threats by the EGC mentioning FEDEPESAN and CREDHOS, the human rights organisation supporting locally FEDEPESAN.

In January and February 2025, FEDEPESAN has reported to the authorities various threats received by its members, which have heightened fear among the fishermen and women of the organization. However, these threats have not received adequate attention from local authorities, including the police. Under these circumstances, on 15 February, FEDEPESAN issued a public statement declaring that they felt forced to leave their territory with their families. This displacement would not only threaten their ability to continue practicing sustainable artisanal fishing but also jeopardize their role in monitoring the environmental impact on Lake and River San Silvestre.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 28 May 2025

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: FEDEPESAN - Federation of Artisanal, Environmentalist, and Touristic Fishermen and Women of Santander (They/them)

PREVIOUS UA: N/A