



**The International Office on Human Rights - Action Colombia welcomes the progress made towards peace and expresses its deep concern at the risk situation faced by Colombian civil society in this new phase in peacebuilding**

Brussels, 12 December 2016

As part of the commemoration of Human Rights Day, the International Office on Human Rights - Action Colombia (OIDHACO) and its signatory members welcome the progress towards peace, congratulate President Santos on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize and appreciate his declaration that he will share it with all the victims of the armed conflict, thereby recognising their fundamental role in peacebuilding.

Over the past four years, the negotiating teams of the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) have conducted peace negotiations in Havana, Cuba, with the participation of Colombian civil society and the accompaniment of representatives

from the diplomatic corps, in order to reach an agreement to end the conflict between both actors that has lasted more than half a century. Following the result of the October 2 referendum in which the *No* vote won, we recognise the efforts of the negotiating teams to continue moving towards peace and we celebrate the endorsement of the new agreement.

Moreover, ODHACO and its signatory members note the announcement in March 2016 of the beginning of the public phase of the peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN), as well as the announcement in October of the installation of the first table of talks envisaged in that process. We regret that to date this installation has not taken place and we encourage the parties to begin this process immediately, a fundamental step in building a lasting and stable peace for Colombia.

Despite the progress made during 2016, ODHACO and its signatory members express their deep concern about the wave of murders, attacks and threats that have taken place in recent weeks against human rights defenders, social leaders and members of political movements, as a result of their work in achieving peace.<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing this communique, ODHACO and its signatory members have been informed of the murder of five social leaders, members of the *Marcha Patriótica* political and social movement, and attacks against the lives of numerous social leaders, local political actors, and human rights defenders.<sup>2</sup> A number of human rights defenders have also been threatened with death, particularly in the city of Barrancabermeja, where a mass threat was issued naming at least six such defenders.<sup>3</sup> So far in 2016, the killing of 70 human rights defenders has been reported, an increase from the previous year; 31 of whom have been killed since the entry into force of the bilateral cease-fire on 29 August 2016. It is also of serious concern that since the *Marcha Patriótica* was founded in 2012, 128 of its members have been killed because of their political affiliation,<sup>4</sup> and it is feared that a situation similar to the genocide perpetrated against the members of the *Unión Patriótica* political party could be repeated, considering the level of instability that Colombia is currently facing.

This wave of attacks coincides with a highly sensitive moment in the peace process and demonstrates the absence of guarantees of security and protection for these people to carry out their legitimate work for peace. The common thread that links the people who were targeted in these attacks is their involvement in the peace process through rural grassroots movements, *campesino* (rural farming) associations, land restitution projects and peace education, among other activities. These people, their families and communities live under a real and constant threat of becoming the target of future attacks, attempts on their lives and murders.

ODHACO and its signatory members therefore consider that the role of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia (OHCHR) should be strengthened through the

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<sup>1</sup> GIL, Andrés, "Enemigos de la paz – Basta ya", en *Semana*, November 22, available at: <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/no-cesa-el-fuego-contra-lideres-sociales-articulo-667771>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid GIL, Andrés.

<sup>3</sup> RUBIANO , María Paula, "No cesa el fuego contra líderes sociales", in *El Espectador*; November 27, 2016, available at: <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/no-cesa-el-fuego-contra-lideres-sociales-articulo-667771>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. RUBIANO, María Paula.

introduction of a human rights component in the United Nations Mission for Colombia, in addition to the Office's current mandate.

Given the current situation of high risk and instability, ODHACO and its signatory members,

Urge the Colombian State to:

- Urgently implement point 3.4 of the Peace Agreement, which provides for the creation of the National Commission of Security Guarantees in order to dismantle paramilitary structures, recognised as the actor responsible for the majority of attacks<sup>5</sup> perpetrated against human rights defenders.<sup>6</sup> Without guaranteeing the safety of such persons, real peace will not be possible;
- Conduct conclusive investigations to clarify the truth surrounding the events that occurred in this wave of violence and bring to justice and sanction those responsible, thus ensuring that impunity does not prevail for violations perpetrated against those who defend peace;
- Guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of all defenders of peace, regardless of their political alliances, enabling an inclusive and participatory process in this new phase towards peacebuilding.

Urge the Parties to the Havana Agreements to:

- Promptly agree to request a second United Nations resolution introducing a human rights component to the current Mission, or a new mission, which will verify compliance with the agreements.

Urge the European Union, its Member States, Switzerland and Norway to:

- Pay special attention to the risk situation of human rights defenders, social leaders and members of political movements at this time of instability and call on the Colombian government to ensure their protection.
- Support, with new resources, the OHCHR in Colombia so that it can carry out its current mandate, the new tasks assigned to it and guarantee its autonomy and continuity independently of the mandate of the United Nations Mission

Signatory organisations:

International Office on Human Rights - Action Colombia (ODHACO)

ABColumbia

Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture (ACAT)

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<sup>5</sup> We are Defenders Program (*Programa Somos Defensores*), "¿Este es el fin? Informe enero-junio de 2016. Sistema de Información sobre Agresiones contra defensores y defensoras de DD.HH. en Colombia - SIADDHH. . p.56, 2016, available at: <http://somosdefensores.org/attachments/article/140/este-es-el-fin-informe-semestral-2016.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Annual report on the situation of human rights in Colombia*, (A/HRC/28/3/Add.3), March 15, available at: [http://www.hchr.org.co/documentoseinformes/informes/altocomisionado/informe\\_anual\\_2015.pdf](http://www.hchr.org.co/documentoseinformes/informes/altocomisionado/informe_anual_2015.pdf).

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