

URGENT ACTION

ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS AT RISK

Human rights defenders from the Magdalena Medio region in southeast Colombia have been subject to multiple threats in recent weeks. On 9 February unknown men broke into the house of the environmental defender Yuvelis Morales. She had received a death threat the day before and was forced to leave Colombia. On 7 February several human rights defenders of the region were also targeted in a pamphlet circulated by an armed group self-identified as Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia ordering them to leave the area or face the consequences. We urge the authorities ensure the safety of all human rights defenders in the region.

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

Mr. Daniel Palacios Martínez
Minister of the Interior

Carrera 8 No. 7 – 83. Bogotá, D.C.
Código Postal: 111711
Colombia

Email: servicioalciudadano@mininterior.gov.co

Dear Mr. Palacios Martínez,

I am writing to express my concern for the safety of human rights defenders in the region of Magdalena Medio in Colombia. In recent weeks, members of the Santander Regional Corporation for the Defence of Human Rights (CREDHOS for initials in Spanish), as well as allied organizations such as the Committee for the Defence of Water, Life and Territory (AGUAWIL for its initials in Spanish), have been subject to multiple threats to their lives.

On February 7, a local paramilitary group circulated a pamphlet calling human rights defenders of CREDHOS and AGUAWIL military targets and giving them and their families 48 hours to leave the area or face the consequences. Targeted defenders included Carolina Agón and Ramón Abril.

Ten days later, on February 17, Yuvelis Natalia Morales, a 21-year-old environmental defender also from Magdalena Medio, was forced to flee Colombia, after her home was broken into.

We urge you to convene an urgent dialogue with the relevant state institutions and civil society organisations to discuss the protection of human rights defenders in the area and implement a protection plan to ensure their safety.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Magdalena Medio is a region rich in natural resources, where Colombia's armed conflict continues to impact the livelihoods of the communities in the area, who also have suffered the consequences of the exploitation of hydrocarbon deposits in the region. The Santander's Regional Corporation for the Defence of Human Rights (CREDHOS) was founded in 1987 in the city of Barrancabermeja. For more than thirty years, CREDHOS has worked for the defence, promotion and protection of human rights, with its work extending to eight municipalities of the Magdalena Medio region of Colombia (North). In recent years, addressing socio-environmental conflicts in the region has gained great importance within the organization. CREDHOS defends the communities' rights to a healthy environment and works closely together with environmental organizations such as the Committee for the Defence of Water, Life and Land (Comité para la defensa del Agua, la vida y el Territorio) and Free Alliance Against Fracking (Alianza Libre contra el Fracking).

Due to their work environmental defenders in the region of the Magdalena Medio have been threatened, harassed and killed. The latest security incidents faced CREDHOS and other environmental defenders in the Magdalena Medio during the last two years have been:

- On 07 February 2022, CREDHOS members were informed through social networks and WhatsApp instant messaging that a threatening pamphlet by an armed group self-identified as Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia was circulating. The pamphlet identified several human rights defenders as military objectives. Among those targeted were Ramón Abril, member of the board of CREDHOS and Carolina Agon, President of the Puerto Wilches Human Rights and of the Federation of Artisanal Fishermen of Puerto Wilches (FEDEPU) and member of CREDHOS
- On 08 February 2022, the environmental defender Yuvelis Morales was the victim of acts of harassment, in which unknown men said to her in the street "hey, take care of yourself, you know what could happen" ("ey cuídese mucho, ya usted sabe"). A day later, in the early morning hours of February 9, unknown men broke into her home damaging the fence and the gate of the patio of her house. Yuvelis has now fled Colombia fearing for her life.
- A year ago on 9 April 2021, Amnesty international issued an [Urgent Action](#) denouncing the risk situation that members of CREDHOS were facing. On 10 February 2021, a confidential community source notified CREDHOS that armed groups were listing CREDHOS staff as military objectives.
- On 9 January 2021, a pamphlet signed by people who identified themselves as "The Magdalena Medio Block of the PAFC- EP" was circulating in social networks and instant messaging applications. The pamphlet ordered CREDHOS to change a report they had issued weeks earlier, which included an analysis of the dynamic of armed groups and illegal economies in two subregions of Colombia: South Bolivar, North-east of Antioquia.
- On 24 October 2020, unknown men broke into the apartment of Dr. Ivonne Suarez Pinzón, a member of CREDHOS' Board of Directors who is also the Director of the Oral Memory Archive of Victims of the Internal Armed Conflict (AMOVIIUS) where documents of the cases presented by the organization before the "Special Jurisdiction for Peace" (JEP) were stored.
- On 1 September 2020, The Secretary of the Board of Directors of CHEDHOS Abelardo Sanchez, denounced to the Attorney General's that his house was watched by unknow men the night before.

According to the Institute for Development and Peace Studies (Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz), 13 human rights defenders were killed in Colombia in January of this year alone, all of them linked to the defence of land, territory and the environment. The Institute has documented thirteen massacres resulting in the deaths of 40 people living in rural areas in Colombia. Amnesty International has [reported on the failed prevention and protection policies](#) that contribute to an unsafe environment for the protection of human rights defenders in the country.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 22 April 2022

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Environmental defenders of the Magdalena Medio (They/Them)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: NA