

URGENT ACTION

INVESTIGATE THREATS AND ATTACKS AGAINST DEFENDERS

On 13 February, a grenade was thrown inside the home of a member of CREDHOS, hurting members of her family. This attack came after serious threats against civil society organizations working to defend human rights, territory, land, and the environment in the Magdalena Medio region of Colombia, including CREDHOS and FEDEPESAN, during January and the beginning of February. We call on the Colombian authorities to address these threats and attacks, including by carrying out robust and effective investigations to determine who is responsible and to take the suspected perpetrators to justice, as well as to provide timely and comprehensive protection for these organisations.

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

Hernando Toro
Director of the Special Investigation Unit
Attorney General's Office
Avenida Calle 24 No. 52 – 01
Bogotá DC, Colombia
E-mail: hernando.toro@fiscalia.gov.co

Dear Director,

I am writing to express my deep concern with the impunity regarding the continued threats and attacks against 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, being declared a “military objective”, and further stigmatized as collaborators with other criminal groups in the area for denouncing the presence of criminal organisations engaged in drug and human trafficking, as well as the environmental damage caused by regional companies. We are particularly concerned by the attack against a member of CREDHOS in Barrancabermeja on the night of 13 February 2024, when a grenade was thrown inside her home, hurting members of her family.

Amnesty International has documented the risk faced by those who defend human rights in Colombia 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 threatened and attacked simply for defending their rights. I am concerned that the state's response to protect human rights defenders at risk, which includes that the crimes they suffer don't remain in impunity, is insufficient.

I urge you to exercise the utmost diligence in effectively fulfilling the Attorney General's Office's duty to investigate the threats and attacks against members of CREDHOS and FEDEPESAN, in order to establish who is responsible for ordering and carrying out these attacks, and to bring them to justice in fair trials to prevent further attacks to those who defend human rights in the Magdalena Medio region.

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 trade 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 threats and attacks against human rights defenders that has persisted since at least the 1980s. In 2023, alarming levels 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 threats and attacks 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 Velázquez, 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 attacks against 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 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. On 9 February, Amnesty International issued a first Urgent Actions asking for protection for CREDHOS after public threats against the organisation's president in pamphlets from different armed groups of the region. On 14 February, CREDHOS denounced publicly that the night of 13 February a women member of the organisation was attacked when two persons threw and detonated a grenade inside her house, hurting members of her family.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 30 April 2024

NAME: CREDHOS & FEDEPESAN

PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr23/7694/2024/en/>