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Speaker: Mr. Paul Scambler

Oral Statement to the 39th Session of the UN Human Rights Council Regular Session - Oral Statement Item 6: UPR Outcomes: Colombia

Mr President,

Lawyers for Lawyersⁱ and Lawyers' Rights Watch Canadaⁱⁱ welcome the decision of Colombia to supportⁱⁱⁱ many recommendations made during its 3rd UPR relating to the protection of human rights lawyers and defenders and the investigation of attacks and threats against them. We welcome Colombia's voluntary commitment to continue adopting measures required for the protection of human rights lawyers and defenders^{iv}. We call on Colombia to effectively implement these recommendations^v without delay.

Despite the November 2016 Peace Agreement, there has been an increase in threats and attacks against human rights lawyers and defenders in Colombia. Since November 2016, hundreds of defenders have been killed and Colombian's Ombudsman has stated that a human rights defender is killed every three days^{vi}.

Lawyers who are defending vulnerable communities are the subject of threats, harassment and attacks, and are not always given sufficient protection measures to ensure they can perform their professional activities effectively and safely.

When the legal profession is not able to function effectively, this gives rise to human rights violations, impunity and injustice. Fundamental to improving human rights in Colombia is the protection of lawyers, so that they can do their work without fear.

We urge the government of Colombia to take effective and comprehensive measures to adequately protect lawyers in danger, including through the program of the National Protection Unit. This unit should get the necessary budgets to carry out and extend its program in view of the increasing attacks. The Colombian government should also prevent any threats and attacks against lawyers and promptly and thoroughly investigate any reports of attacks to end impunity.

Thank you.

ⁱ Lawyers for Lawyers is an independent and non-political Dutch foundation which seeks to promote the proper functioning of the rule of law by pursuing freedom and independence of the legal profession. We do this by supporting lawyers worldwide who are threatened or suppressed in the execution of their profession.

Lawyers for Lawyers was granted Special Consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council in July 2013. www.lawyersforlawyers.org

ⁱⁱ Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC) is a committee of lawyers and other human rights defenders who promote international human rights and the rule of law through advocacy, education and legal research. LRWC is a volunteer-run NGO with Special Consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council since 2005. <https://www.lrwc.org>

ⁱⁱⁱ Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Colombia, A/HRC/39/6

^{iv} Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Colombia, A/HRC/39/6

^v Idem. Recommendations: 120.33 Promptly hold accountable those responsible for attacks on human rights defenders and members of vulnerable groups (United States of America);

120.37 Ensure that judicial authorities conduct, in accordance with international law standards, full, prompt and impartial criminal investigations and prosecutions of crimes under international law and human rights abuses against human rights defenders (Finland);

120.41 Ensure that all perpetrators of attacks and threats against human rights defenders are brought to justice (Montenegro);

120.51 Redouble efforts to investigate threats and acts of violence against human rights defenders and punish perpetrators of such acts (Argentina);

120.55 Ensure that human rights defenders are protected while carrying out their important work and the judicial authorities conduct full and impartial criminal investigations so that perpetrators are held accountable (Austria);

120.56 Recognize and actively support the work of human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, with specific measures to put an end to impunity for the violence committed against them and ensure the effective implementation of the existing protection mechanisms (Belgium);

120.57 Strengthen the programme on prevention and protection that includes victims of armed conflicts, human rights defenders, journalists, trade union leaders, land claimants and political leaders (Plurinational State of Bolivia);

120.58 Take further actions to improve the prevention of, and response to, threats, attacks and killings of human rights defenders and social leaders, through strengthening security, timely investigations and addressing impunity (Canada);

120.59 Take effective measures to combat the killing of human rights defenders and bring the perpetrators to justice (Congo);

120.60 Strengthen the existing mechanisms for the protection of human rights defenders, focusing on rural areas and territories where illicit economies flourish (Costa Rica);

120.61 Take the necessary measures to increase the political participation of women, in particular in legislative bodies (Costa Rica);

120.62 Step up efforts to prevent killings and attacks on human rights defenders and ensure full investigation of these crimes (Czechia);

120.63 Work with civil society to strengthen protection for members of vulnerable communities by implementing effective collective protection

schemes tailored to ethnicity, gender and regional circumstances (United States of America);

120.64 Protect, in collaboration with civil society, human rights defenders (France);

120.65 Ensure that activists, human rights defenders and other social and community leaders, especially in rural areas, are equally and effectively protected also in view of the current challenges facing the implementation of the final peace accord, by, inter alia, ensuring an effective presence of government institutions in all areas of the country (Germany);

120.66 Consider establishing a protection programme for women rights defenders, taking into account their needs and realities from a gender- differentiated perspective, and allocate adequate financial and human resources for its implementation (Ghana);

120.67 Ensure the continuation of current measures to safeguard the work of human rights defenders and the ongoing judicial investigations into the murders of human rights defenders (Uruguay);

120.68 Continue to promote actions, through the National Reincorporation Council, to consolidate the efforts of reintegration and political participation (Dominican Republic);

120.69 Continue efforts to strengthen the institutional framework to protect and guarantee the work of defenders and social leaders (Dominican Republic);

120.70 Take all measures to protect human rights defenders and ensure that perpetrators of threats and attacks are brought to justice (Ireland);

120.71 Take steps to ensure the effective protection of human rights defenders and of persons belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples (Italy);

120.72 Take further measures to prevent systematic violence against local leaders and human rights defenders, improve individual and collective protection of those at risk, and focus on investigating and prosecuting the intellectual authors of the threats and killings (Netherlands);

120.73 Prevent and investigate all attacks against human rights defenders and community leaders, including trade unionists, indigenous leaders and environmentalist defenders, and bring those responsible to justice (Norway);

120.74 Give greater consideration to human rights defenders, including female defenders and youth-led organizations engaged in the defence and promotion of human rights (Poland);

120.75 Effectively ensure the safety of human rights defenders, including by conducting detailed investigations into the attacks against them (Republic of Korea);

120.76 Reinforce measures to protect human rights defenders and to fight impunity for attacks against human rights defenders (Slovenia);

120.77 Ensure that human rights defenders are able to carry out their work free from intimidation, threats, harassment and attacks and guarantee their safety, especially those working in rural conflict-prone areas (Sweden):

120.78 Advance in the recognition and protection of human rights defenders, avoiding their criminalization and fighting impunity (Spain):

^{vi} https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/07/05/colombia/1530814532_235398.html