

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

Organization: Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

Item: Item 2: General Debate

Date: 8 March 2021

Speaker: Catherine Morris

Oral Statement to the 49th Session of the UN Human Rights Council from Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC), NGO in special consultative status

Situation of human rights in Colombia: Report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Mr. President,

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada appreciates the High Commissioner's report on Colombia.¹ We note her concern about high levels of stigmatization and violence against human rights defenders,² as well as persistent challenges in investigation to identify the perpetrators.³ We concur with her emphasis on the need to dismantle non-State armed groups.⁴

We are alarmed by an escalation of threats and attacks against defenders, including lawyers.⁵ These disturbing trends took place in the context of excessive and unlawful use of force by police and riot squads⁶ against peaceful demonstrators and defenders during the National Strike and social protests of 2021.⁷ Increased violence continues in various regions, affecting defenders as well as Indigenous and Afrodescendant peoples, campesino communities, and community leaders.⁸ State agents exacerbate the risks faced by individuals and organizations undertaking vital human rights work by falsely stigmatizing them as "internal enemies."⁹

We call upon the Council to urge Colombia to:

1. Adequately address the root causes of violence and stigmatization of defenders;¹⁰
2. Take effective measures to dismantle paramilitary and criminal organizations responsible for the violence; and
3. Strengthen its capacity to investigate and bring to justice both direct and intellectual authors of attacks on defenders, and strengthen protection measures¹¹ in line with the High Commissioner's report.¹²

Thank you, Mr. President.

References

¹ OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Colombia: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Unofficial English Version of Report A/HRC/49/19, 25 February 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session49/Documents/A_HRC_49_19_UnofficialEnglishVersion.pdf

² *Ibid*, para 41-42.

³ *Ibid*, para 46.

⁴ *Ibid*, para 46. This finding is consistent with the High Commissioner's reflections on the urgent need for the State to effectively address the high levels of violence in Colombia that threaten peace, as with human rights defenders, social leaders, ethnic communities and the former now demobilized FARC-EP combatants: High Commissioner's remarks on 24 November 2021, 5th Anniversary of Signing of Peace Accord:

<https://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27863&LangID=S>

⁵ Heather Neun and Catherine Morris, Escalating Threats to Colombian Human Rights Advocates: The Day of the Endangered Lawyer, Slaw.ca, 24 January 2022, <http://www.slaw.ca/2022/01/11/escalating-threats-to-colombian-human-rights-advocates-the-day-of-the-endangered-lawyer-24-january-2022/>; The Day of the Endangered Lawyer, Day of the Endangered Lawyer 2022: 12th edition – COLOMBIA, January 2022, https://eldh.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/EN-Final-Report-Colombia_DEF.pdf.

⁶ Police riot squads are called Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios (ESMAD), or Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron.

⁷ UNOHRC, press release dated 14 May 2021:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27093&LangID=E>. See also Colombian office report which verifies the deaths of 30 HRDs, National Strike 2021: Lessons learned for the exercise of the right of peaceful assembly in Colombia, UNOHRC, para 159, https://www.hchr.org.co/documentoseinformes/documentos/Colombia_Documento-lecciones-aprendidas-y-observaciones-Paro-Nacional-2021.pdf.

⁸ See Colombia office press release dated 24 February 2022, https://www.hchr.org.co/files/02-24-2022_Comunicado_Personas_Defensoras.pdf

⁹ HCHR Report, *supra* note 1, para 41; IACHR, Press Release dated 25 February 2022, <http://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2022/040.asp>

¹⁰ IACHR, Press Release dated 25 February 2022, <http://www.oas.org/es/CIDH/jsForm/?File=/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2022/040.asp>

¹¹ Oficina de la ONU para los Derechos Humanos urge a que se refuercen medidas de protección para garantizar la vida y la labor de personas defensoras de derechos humanos en Colombia, 24 February 2022, https://www.hchr.org.co/files/02-24-2022_Comunicado_Personas_Defensoras.pdf

¹² HCHR report, *supra* note 1, para 47.