



Brussels, 8 October 2020

The Oidhaco General Assembly calls for guarantees for peaceful public demonstration in light of the Social and Community March in South-Western Colombia for the defence of life, territory, democracy and peace (*La Minga*), set to take place on 10 October 2020

On 7 and 8 October 2020, the Oidhaco network of 35 European and international organisations working for the defence of human rights and peace in Colombia, held its General Assembly. We learned that indigenous people are planning to hold a public demonstration known as a *Minga* starting on 10 October. Due to past experiences, we would like to express our concerns about the risk of violent repression by the state security forces against the protesters. The General Assembly would like to call for respect for all the rights related to freedom of expression and peaceful public demonstration¹ during the protests planned for this Saturday 10 October, known as the **Social and Community March in South-Western Colombia, for the defence of life, territory, democracy and peace (*La Minga*)**.

The march is taking place after various attempts have been made to engage in dialogue with President Duque, dialogue which is urgent due to the needs of indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombian communities. The situation of armed conflict in their lands is causing confinement and forced displacement, and indigenous and Afro-Colombian community leaders are facing systematic extermination in the South-West and other regions of the country. According to the Cauca Regional

¹ Freedom of association, free movement, freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, freedom of opposition, participation and assembly

Indigenous Council (CRIC), 63 indigenous community members and leaders have been killed in 2020 alone², in the departments of Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Nariño, Putumayo and Chocó, where a large part of the population are ethnic minorities, and where 27 of the 66 total massacres in Colombia were committed this year.³

We would like to draw attention to recent protests on 9 and 10 September 2020, in which at least 13 bystanders and participants were killed as a consequence of the indiscriminate use of firearms by the national police and the anti-riot squad (ESMAD). This risk is worsened by the lack of implementation of Interior Ministry Resolution 1190 of 2018, which establishes a protocol to coordinate actions which respect and guarantee peaceful protest. We also highlight the recent safeguarding ruling by the Supreme Court Appeals Chamber, which safeguards the right of all persons to demonstrate and the duty of the authorities to “prohibit, prevent and sanction the systematic, violent and arbitrary intervention of the state security forces in demonstrations and protests”.

We would also like to recall that members of the state security forces and high-ranking Colombian government officials⁴ stigmatised the 2019 National *Minga*, which increased risks for the participants and, in particular, for social leaders belonging to the organisations that coordinated the protests. Subsequently an attempted massacre was committed when a grenade was launched against leaders of the *Minga* who were preparing for a dialogue with the government ([See Oidhaco press release of 13 May 2019](#)).

Considering the above, we ask the international community to:

- Urge the Colombian government to resume social and political dialogue as soon as possible, with indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombian communities, to confront the demands of the social sectors who are organising the demonstrations in relation to the rights of ethnic peoples
- Urge the Colombian government to take robust and comprehensive measures to prevent new acts of violence being committed by members of the state security forces during the protests
- Closely monitor respect for the right to peaceful public protest during the Indigenous *Minga* planned to start on 10 October 2020
- Call upon the Colombian government to urgently implement Resolution 1190 of 2018 which establishes a protocol to coordinate actions which respect and guarantee peaceful protest
- Urge the Colombian government to abstain from stigmatising the protest and thereby putting its leaders, organisers and participants at risk, and to take effective disciplinary measures if government officials engage in this kind of stigmatisation.

Further information

OIDHACO: Jorge Gómez, OIDHACO Coordinator, oidhaco@oidhaco.org, tel. +32 2 5361913

² <https://www.rcnradio.com/colombia/sur/alerta-por-aumento-de-asesinatos-en-territorios-indigenas-en-cauca>

³ Indepaz, Masacres en Colombia 2020, accessed on 8/10/2020

⁴ <https://www.fidh.org/es/temas/defensores-de-derechos-humanos/colombia-estigmatizacion-y-criminalizacion-de-la-protesta-social-la>