

Attacks against human rights defenders in Colombia continue to increase

Between January and September 2012 there were 235 individual attacks against human defenders (including 128 threats, 37 killings - including 12 in the Cauca region -, 3 disappearances, 39 attacks, 24 arbitrary arrests and one case of sexual violence). **In the first half of 2012 the numbers of attacks represented an increase of 12% over the same period last year**, while in 2011 there had been an increase of 36% of attacks compared to 2010 (with 239 individual attacks including 49 murders and 6 forced disappearances). This represents, therefore, a continuous and worrying increase. This situation exists despite the ongoing dialogue that human rights platforms and social sectors have maintained for three years with the state and the national government in the National Working Group on Guarantees (*Mesa Nacional de Garantías*).

Among these attacks, there were a **high number of arbitrary arrests**: between January and September 2012 there were 24 arbitrary detentions, which exceeds the number for the previous twelve months (23 arbitrary arrests in 2011). The OHCHR indicated in its latest annual report *"Of particular concern in 2011 were numerous cases of harassment, threats, and detention apparently without proper investigation"*.

Attacks against people mobilising for peace

Particularly alarming are the attacks against those who mobilize for peace. The **three cases of enforced disappearance** reported during the first half of the year have a direct link with the "Patriotic March" held in May 2012 (SIADDHH, January-June 2012). And on October 12, 2012 the Patriotic March reported arbitrary arrests by the security forces during the peaceful march in Bogotá that day to celebrate the launch of peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas in Oslo.

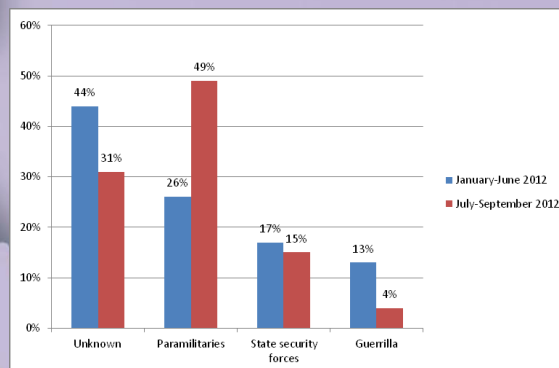
Indigenous people in the region of Cauca face repression for their rejection of all actors in the armed conflict.

In July 2012, indigenous people from the Cauca department decided, after suffering further serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, to reject any armed presence in their territory. **Their demands for a withdrawal of the different armed actors provoked retaliation from them.**

The repression of protests by the armed forces left at least 32 indigenous people injured and one killed. Also, there were serious accusations, for example when the Ministry of Defence stated that it was "clear that there is some infiltration of the guerrillas in the protests". This kind of accusation seriously increases the risk for protestors. On July 27, pamphlets from paramilitary groups calling themselves the "Black Eagles and Rastrojos" intimidating and making serious accusations and threats against indigenous and peasant organisations, were distributed in the municipalities of Corinto, Miranda and Caloto. On August 15, 2012, President Santos apologized to the indigenous peoples for the violence to which they had been submitted and a dialogue was set up to agree on measures before 30 October. However, the indigenous people denounced the lack of progress in this dialogue and note that since August the conflict has worsened and threats against leaders of indigenous communities continue.

Then, on September 24, 2012, 13 human rights defenders from the departments of Cauca and Valle del Cauca, including Ms. Aida Quilcué, a prominent member of the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC), received a death threat. On October 3, 2012 the indigenous leader Selatiel Méndez Secué from the Nasa People in the municipality of Toribío, Norte del Cauca, was killed by FARC members. Mr. Selatiel was known for his mobilization for territory, the environment, and the rights of his community. There were also several FARC attacks against the leaders of indigenous councils in Cauca in October.

Actors presumed responsible for attacks against human rights defenders



Source: Somos Defensores Programme

Attacks and persecution against trade unionists continue.

By mid-October, 17 trade unionists had been murdered in Colombia - 10 of whom belonged to the General Confederation of Workers (CGT). Also, by August 2012, the CUT had recorded 146 threats to workers this year. It is important to recall that in 2011, Colombia was, once again, the country where the most trade unionists were murdered worldwide, with 35 killings. 342 threats were also recorded in 2011(CSI).

On October 1, Jesus Arnulfo Ramirez Jaramillo was killed, a teacher at the Institución Educativa María Reina in the Guática Municipality, Department of Risaralda. Mr. Ramirez was for many years an official delegate to the General Assembly of Delegates of the CUT, and Assembly Delegate of the Cooperative Coodelmar.

According to the CUT, "in the government of President Juan Manuel Santos 27 teachers affiliated to trade unions were killed, amid the greatest impunity, making Colombia the most dangerous country in the world, not only for union leaders, but for teachers".

Constant threats against people participating in land restitution processes

Those directly and indirectly involved in land restitution processes are still under severe attack. **Threats from a paramilitary group calling itself “The Anti-restitution Army” are constant.**

On October 2, this group threatened several human rights defenders and leaders of peasant organisations claiming land in the town of Carmen de Bolívar (Bolívar department) via a text message to the cell phone of each threatened person. In the threat the group warned that they had them fully identified. For the defender Ivan Cepeda, ***“it is extremely serious that just a day after the government widely offers rewards for information leading to anti-restitution groups, one of them appears today threatening us (...), and we do not know how the investigation into this group is progressing”***. That same day, the group also threatened the NGO Humanidad Vigente and other organisations including Fundación Infancia Feliz and Colectivo Mujeres al Derecho. Amnesty International noted that “these death threats are part of a recent wave of threats, attacks and killings”. On October 10, 2012 the “anti-restitution group” sent an email threat to 12 community leaders and human rights defenders, including Corporación Compromiso, based in Bucaramanga, Santander Department. And on October 11, the Coordinación Nacional de Desplazados (National Coordination of Displaced Persons) received a death threat from “The Anti-Land Restitution Army”, which mentioned several people and organisations defending human rights.

In July 2012, the Office in Colombia of the United Nations for Human Rights ***“condemn(ed) vehemently new threats against defenders of human rights in Colombia, and land claimants”*** after having seen a leaflet signed by the self-styled “anti-restitution army”.

It is important to recall that in 2011 at least 28 peasant leaders and victims of displacement and dispossession, linked to land restitution processes, were murdered.

Permanent situation of risk for indigenous peoples and attacks against their leaders

Indigenous peoples continue to face serious risks, particularly because of the pressures that different armed actors continue to exert over their territories. As noted by the Constitutional Court, at least 35 indigenous peoples are in danger of extinction. The National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) reported that in the first nine months of this year, 78 indigenous people have been killed, 10,515 have been forcibly displaced and 47 have received death threats.

This is reflected in particular in attacks against and killings of indigenous leaders. Thus, in the first half of 2012, of the 29 leaders who were killed, 13 were indigenous leaders (44.8% of the total). It is important to recall that already in 2011, of the 49 defenders killed, 19 were also indigenous. ***“This shows how indigenous peoples became obstacles to the desires of armed actors and other powerful actors in the regions”***. (SIADDHH).

On October 21, 2012, Leovigildo Cunampia Quiro was killed. He was president of the indigenous council of the municipality of Nuquí on the Pacific Coast (Camizcop) in Chocó. In addition, community health worker, Jose Manuel Bariquirura, was injured. UNDP condemned this murder. Mr. Cunampia Quiro coordinated with others a UNDP - Ministry of Environment project with the indigenous council.

Sources used:

Given this situation, we recommended that the European Union and its Member States, Norway and Switzerland:

- speak out publicly about the seriousness of these events showing support for the work of Human Rights defenders ;
- demand protection and investigation into these events on the part of the Colombian state, as well as guarantees so that people who defend human rights and mobilize for peace may have a real voice in the peace process.

- [Report January-June 2012 of the We are Defenders Program \(Programa Somos Defensores\)](#), “Un camino solitario”, Information system on aggressions against human rights defenders in Colombia (SIADDHH), julio de 2012 and [Boletín Trimestral - July – September 2012](#)
- OHCHR, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Colombia, A/HRC/19/21/Add.3, January 31, 2012
- [UNDP, PNUD condena el asesinato del líder indígena Leovigildo Cunampia, October 25, 2012](#)
- Marcha Patriótica, Agredidos y detenidos manifestantes en Bogotá, October 12, 2012
- [ACIN - Cauca](#)