

The ODHACO General Assembly requests guarantees for protesters during the National Strike in Colombia and sends alert regarding alleged use of excessive force by the state security forces.

On 28 April, a National Strike began in more than 500 municipalities in Colombia. Convened by the National Strike Committee, this protest brings together several sectors of the population. The protesters are criticizing the government's tax reform bill, as they believe that it would lead to greater poverty. They are protesting about the mismanagement of the health crisis aggravated by the covid19 pandemic. The strike is also demanding that "the government effectively protects social leaders, implements the peace agreement, strengthens health care, accelerates vaccinations, guarantees the basic minimum wage, zero tuition fees and support for small businesses, and respects democratic guarantees".¹

It is important to note that this national strike is the continuation of a series of peaceful social protests in recent years, calling for policy change to strengthen and protect the rights and social situation of the most vulnerable groups in society, especially in the current situation aggravated by the pandemic². Several of the demands that the Strike Committee submitted last year are being reiterated, including its emergency list of demands³.

The ODHACO General Assembly calls for the respect of all rights related to free expression, public and peaceful demonstration in the context of social protests. We are concerned about the alleged excessive and disproportionate use of force, arbitrary arrests of protesters and human rights defenders by the state security forces, with the aim of suppressing, dissolving and preventing social protest. We are particularly concerned about reports of injured persons and arrests on 28 April, including alleged irregular procedures that do not meet international standards, and could be considered to be arbitrary detentions⁴. The ODHACO General Assembly also rejects reported acts of vandalism, which are being used as an attempt to delegitimize this peaceful protest.

Given the current highly conflictive situation and the possible risks of human rights violations against the protesters, we call upon the international community to urge the Colombian Government to:

- **Publicly recognize the right of Colombian citizens to engage in peaceful protest activities** against government policies as a legitimate form of political participation in a country in transition to peace;
- **Promote dialogue and consensus** to address social and political conflicts, as well as the demands of the sectors that have convened the protests;
- **Investigate and implement sanctions** against state actors and others responsible for abuse and violence during the protests;

¹ Comunicado Comité Nacional de Paro, [CONTUNDENTES MANIFESTACIONES EN TODO EL PAÍS Y EL EXTERIOR ¡EL PARO CONTINUA!](#) 28 April 2021 (Unofficial Translation)

² RTBF, Colombia: manifestations contre un projet de réforme fiscale. Available at:

https://www.rtb.be/info/monde/detail_colombie-manifestations-contre-un-projet-de-reforme-fiscale?id=10751151

³El Espectador, Paro nacional continúa este jueves y se convoca nuevamente para el 19 de mayo. Available at: <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/paro-nacional-continua-este-jueves-y-se-convoca-nuevamente-para-el-19-de-mayo/>

⁴ CAMPAÑA DEFENDER LA LIBERTAD: ASUNTO DE TODAS. Boletín informativo 3: #ParoNacional28A. Available at: <https://defenderlalibertad.com/boletin-informativo-3-paronacional28a/>



- **Ensure that local authorities monitor and control the state security forces** in accordance with Decree 563 of 2015;
- **Call upon the Government of Colombia to comply fully with judgment 7641 of 22 September 2020 issued by the Supreme Court of Justice** protecting the right to protest, and to adopt regulations on the use of force in line with international standards, closing the legal loopholes in Decree 003/2021, with the participation of civil society and human rights organisations who are experts in the field;
- **Refrain from making statements that defame, delegitimize and stigmatize** social mobilization and refrain from making unfounded accusations that may endanger people involved in the protests.

