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A CALL ON THE PROTECTION OF LIFE, THE TERRITORY AND THE EXERCISE OF SELF-GOVERNMENT OF THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES OF THE CAUCA DEPARTMENT

The international civil society organisations signatories to this public statement, Diakonia, ForumCiv, Act Church of Sweden, We Effect and SweFOR, responsible for the implementation of the Project “*Aremos Paz*”, funded by the European Fund for Peace of the European Union and the Swedish International Development Agency - Sida, and the International Office for Human Rights Action on Colombia - Oidhaco, reject and condemn the murder of Governor Sandra Liliana Peña Chocué of the *La Laguna Siberia* Indigenous Reservation, municipality of Caldono, which is part of the Association of Indigenous Councils *Sat'h Tama Kiwe* of the Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca-CRIC.

In the unfortunate events that occurred on April 20th, the indigenous guard Avelino Ull, a member of the Indigenous Guard of the *Sat'h Tama Kiwe* Territory, who was transporting the Governor, was also injured; both were addressing a session of the Mixed Commission between the national government and the CRIC. On April 22nd, as this public statement was being written, armed men attacked the “*Minga Hacia Adentro*” in the ancestral territory of *La Laguna Siberia* in Caldono, leaving several people injured.

Governor Sandra Liliana Peña Chocué had an active leadership in favour of protecting the autonomy and ancestral culture of the *Nasa* people and the recognition of the role of women in indigenous resistance and struggle. She stood out for her conviction and rejection of pressure from armed actors who promote the expansion of illicit crops in this territory, illegal mining, and actions that affect collective and territorial rights, and the culture of the *Nasa* people. The governor participated with an active leadership committed to peace building and to the rights of indigenous peoples, in some of the activities of the “*Aremos Paz*” Project, which is currently being developed in the department of Cauca, promoting the implementation of the Peace Agreement, especially chapter 1 regarding comprehensive rural reform.

This murder shows the lack of guarantees for the defense of human rights in Colombia, particularly for indigenous women. The department of Cauca currently ranks first in assassinations of leaders in Colombia, including indigenous leaders. Additionally, it is an attack against the life, integrity, and role of the authorities of the indigenous peoples and their life plan within the framework of the search for peace. These events take place amidst the context of an upsurge of violence in the department of Cauca due to the deepening of the armed conflict and the territorial control by armed actors, as well as the worsening of the humanitarian crisis, exacerbated in the framework of the Pandemic; situations that disproportionately affect indigenous, peasant and Afro-descendant communities, leaders, and signatories of the Peace Agreement.

The Ombudsman's Office, through the Early Warning No 040-2020, warned the Colombian State about the critical risk situation for the inhabitants of the 6 indigenous reservations in the municipality of Caldono (Caldono, Pioyá, Pueblo Nuevo, La Aguada, La Laguna Siberia, Las Mercedes); and especially a higher risk situation for the Indigenous Authorities of the Ancestral Territory of the *Nasa Sath Tama Kiwe* People, who had recently received direct threats from armed groups. The Ombudsman's Office issued recommendations to the local and national institutions to adopt effective measures to dissuade, mitigate and control the risk in the face of new threatening



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situations that could arise in the municipality of Caldono. It is preoccupying that the killings persist despite the timely recommendations issued by the Ombudsman's Office.

As international civil society organisations we call on the Colombian State, its national, regional, and local authorities to:

- Take immediate measures to address the structural causes behind the threats, killings and attacks faced by those who defend human rights in the *Sat'h Tama Kiwe* territory and to guarantee non-repetition for the other authorities of the *Sat'h Tama Kiwe* territory that are threatened for defending their collective and territorial rights.
- Protect and preserve the fundamental right to life and survival of the indigenous communities of the *Sat'h Tama Kiwe* territory, as well as other peasant, indigenous, Afro-descendant communities, and signatories of the Peace Agreement.
- Respect, protect and provide guarantees to the exercise and instances of self-government of the indigenous communities, to their authorities and initiatives of collective protection such as the Indigenous Guard.
- Promote guarantees for leaders, human rights defenders and authorities who defend collective and territorial rights and the implementation of the Peace Agreement; in protection of the right to defend rights and the right to peace, both recognized in the national and international legal framework.
- Carry out actions to clarify what happened; right to truth, justice, and reparation for the family of Governor Sandra Liliana Peña Chocué, their Reservation and Association of Councils.

Likewise, we request the International Community to:

- Monitor the situation in the municipality of Caldono and in the department of Cauca in the face of systematic and generalized human rights violations and breaches of the IHL.
- Support for indigenous, peasant and Afro-descendant communities and signatories of the Peace Agreement of the department of Cauca in their tireless search for peace, territorial autonomy, and the right to a dignified life.
- Urge the Colombian State to comply with its constitutional and international obligation to protect the life, integrity, honour, and freedom of expression of those who defend rights and peace, especially the indigenous authorities and women defenders of human rights, as well as the communities that support the implementation of the Peace Agreement.
- Urge the Colombian authorities to carry out an immediate, exhaustive, and impartial investigation into the murder of Sandra Liliana Peña Chocué, considering the thesis that her death is related to her activities as defender of the environment, the land, and the territory.
- Request the competent authorities to take all necessary measures to guarantee the safety of the relatives of Governor Sandra Liliana Peña Chocué, their Reservation and their Association of Councils, in concert with the affected persons, including an immediate risk assessment for the community.
- Advance in the comprehensive implementation of the Peace Agreement, particularly the ethnic approach, and in the establishment and implementation of a policy for the dismantling of criminal groups that attack human rights defenders, social movements (...), including the dismantling of paramilitary successor groups.



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We express our profound solidarity and support with the family of Governor Sandra Liliana Peña Chicué, her daughters, the authorities of the Association of Indigenous Councils *Sat'h Tama Kiwe* and the CRIC; as well as with the indigenous guard Avelino Ull and the people who have been wounded in the middle of the attacks by armed persons against the "*Minga Hacia Adentro*" in the ancestral territory of *La Laguna Siberia* in Caldono. We hope that all of the wounded have a prompt recovery and receive effective protection guarantees from the Colombian State.

We express our support for the leaderships of indigenous women and the efforts of indigenous communities and their authorities in the construction of territorial peace, from their own worldview and the exercise of the principles of autonomy, the survival of culture and defense of the territory. We also express our support to the current Permanent Assembly declared the same day of the events by the 127 traditional authorities and the 10 ethnical communities belonging to the CRIC, and to the other peaceful measures that they decree necessary to demand the protection and respect of the life of the indigenous communities, the justice and non-repetition of these events.