

Excmo. Sr. Presidente Iván Duque MárquezPresident of the Republic of Colombia
via email: contacto@presidencia.gov.co

August 22, 2020

Dear President Duque:

We are extremely disturbed by the increasing death threats against **Senator Iván Cepeda Castro** since the Colombia Supreme Court of Justice ordered the house arrest of Ex-President Álvaro Uribe on August 4. It was an investigation begun by Senator Cepeda eight years ago that set off the chain of events leading to the eventual arrest of Mr. Uribe.

In 2012, Senator Cepeda gathered evidence that President Uribe was supporting illegal paramilitary groups in carrying out human rights abuses. Mr. Uribe filed a complaint against Senator Cepeda accusing him of pressuring imprisoned paramilitary fighters to testify against Mr. Uribe. In 2018, the Supreme Court, which has jurisdiction over cases involving former presidents, exonerated Senator Cepeda; the Court then began investigating Mr. Uribe for bribery, fraud, and witness tampering. The Court is also trying to determine if one of Mr. Uribe's lawyers, with his consent, paid imprisoned paramilitaries to give testimony favoring the ex-president.

This is the first time that a Colombian court has detained a former president. Although Mr. Uribe has not yet been formally charged, he is feeling the political impacts of the accusations. He announced on August 18 that he is resigning the Senate seat he has held since 2014, saying his position as a lawmaker has been impeded by the Supreme Court probe.

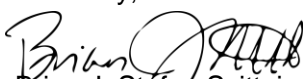
We are dismayed to learn that you, President Duque, went on national television and insisted that Mr. Uribe is a "genuine patriot" and victim of unjust accusations and defamation. These statements exceed your jurisdiction and violate the independence of constitutional powers. We are equally distressed that statements calling for Mr. Uribe's release from house arrest have been echoed by U.S. Vice-President Mike Pence.

Over the past two weeks, Senator Cepeda, a plaintiff in the case against Mr. Uribe, has experienced more than fifty death threats, including some very aggressive ones. There have been threatening messages against his family, his lawyer, members of the José Alvear Restrepo Collective of lawyers, and magistrates of the Colombia Supreme Court.

Because of the imminent danger to the life of Senator Ivan Cepeda, his family and colleagues, we **strongly urge** that you

- take all means necessary to protect the lives of Senator Ivan Cepeda and others receiving threats, in strict accordance with their wishes
- refrain from making public statements in defense of former president Álvaro Uribe
- allow the judicial process for Mr. Uribe's case to proceed according to law

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator



Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

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US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Gonzalez, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

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