

<p>Excmo. Sr. Presidente Gustavo Petro Urrego President of the Republic of Colombia contacto@presidencia.gov.co</p>	<p>Sra. Luz Adriana Camargo Attorney General of Colombia despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co</p>
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July 14, 2024

Dear President Petro and Attorney General Camargo:

We are saddened and deeply concern to learn of the assassination **Yoli María Toloza Cardoza**, who served on the coordinating team of the Popular Women's Organization (OFP) in Puerto Wilches, Santander Department. The 52-year-old grew up there and became well-known and respected throughout Puerto Wilches and the Magdalena Medio region because of her ccommitment to advancing women's rights.

On June 27 at 11:00 a.m., two armed men traveling on a motorcycle entered the home of Yoli María Toloza Cardoza in the Torcoroma neighborhood of Puerto Wilches. Without saying a word they shot her in the forehead. Her neighbors and colleagues from OFP mobilized to her aid to take her to the hospital, but she arrived there showing no vital signs.

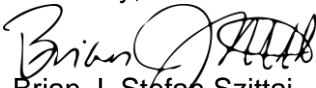
Her home is located directly in front of the headquarters of the regional OFP chapter, where she also maintained a clothing workshop. The fact that Yoli María Toloza Cardoza was murdered in her own home so close to the OFP office underscores the danger faced by those advocating for justice and equality in the Magdalena Medio region. The presence of the paramilitary organization Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC, also known as Clan del Golfo) exacerbates the risk to social leaders in the area.

According to the Colombian government (Defensoría del Pueblo), there were 181 social leaders and human rights defenders killed in 2023. The non-governmental organization Indepaz (Institute of Studies for Development and Peace) has registered 86 murders of social leaders during the first six months of this year.

We urge that authorities in Colombia:

- conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the assassination of Yoli María Toloza Cardoza, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- consult with leaders of OFP to devise safety measures for their leaders and active members—at their headquarters in Barrancabermeja (Santander Department) and regional chapters
- enhance protection measures for social leaders and human rights defenders and provide sustainable resources for their protection
- pursue peace negotiations with illegal armed groups operating in the Magdalena Medio region and take measures to dismantle them

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator


Christine L. Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Daniel García-Peña, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via email, US mail
José Luis Caballero Ochoa, Rapporteur for Colombia , Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) ~ via email, US mail
Roberta Clarke, Rapporteur on the Rights of Women, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) ~ via email, US mail
UN: Juliette De Rivero, Representative in Colombia of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ~ via email
Organización Femenina Popular/Popular Women's Organization ~ via email
Los Equipos y Comunidades de Acción por la Paz / Community Peacemaker Teams ~ via email
US Embassy: Francisco Palmieri (Chargé d'Affaires, ad interim); Adam Levy (human rights) ~ via email
US State Department: Desk Officer for Colombia ~ via email
US Senators from Ohio: Brown & Vance ~ via email
US Representatives from Ohio: Beatty, Brown, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

28 JUN 2024_OFP_Colombia

The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: