

<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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August 5, 2024

Dear President Petro and Attorney General Camargo:

We are writing with deep concern and mourning over the loss of community journalist and social leader, **Jorge Méndez Pardo**, who was assassinated on June 27 in Tibú, in the Catatumbo region of Norte de Santander Department. That morning Jorge Méndez was traveling in a rural zone of Tibú along the road that connects the sectors La Silla and La Llana. Local residents found his car abandoned and alerted the Norte de Santander Police, who began a search and found his body in the village La Florida, close to the paved road that connects urban Tibú with the regional capital, Cúcuta. It had multiple bullet wounds and signs of torture.

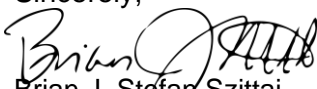
From his hometown (a rural hamlet called La Gabarra), the community journalist known as “Yeiko the leader” administered a Facebook page with 650,000 followers, “La Gabarra con una imagen diferente,” highlighting a positive image of the region plagued with armed violence near the Venezuela border. Jorge Méndez had called on the national government to intervene to mitigate the violence. After learning of his assassination, a social leader from La Gabarra commented: “He was a young dreamer, a young man who wanted to show a different image of La Gabarra, show its resilience, show the beautiful things, its people, its landscapes, its nature, he sought to remove that stigmatization of La Gabarra, which for many years [from] the outside looked like that image of violence that has plagued it for years...”

We are concerned about the dangerous climate for journalists in Colombia. The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (SRFOE) of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has reported that at least five journalists have been murdered in Colombia so far this year: Mardonio Mejía Mendoza (January 24 in Sucre Dept.), Jaime Vásquez (April 14 in Norte de Santander Dept.), Julio Zapata (April 22 in Antioquia Dept.), Hilton Eduardo Barrios (April 26 in Meta Dept.), and Jorge Méndez (June 27 in Norte de Santander Dept.).

We understand that the State has already begun an investigation into the case, and we are writing to ask that prosecutions proceed. We urge that authorities in Colombia:

- conduct a thorough, impartial, and transparent investigation of the assassination of Jorge Méndez Pardo, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- publicly condemn crimes against journalists as a form of extreme and intolerable censorship, speaking loudly and clearly to potential future offenders
- provide protections to journalists, in strict accordance with their wishes

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
Pedro José Vaca Villarreal, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, 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
FLIP: Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa / Foundation for Freedom of the Press ~ 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

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