

<p><b>Excmo. Sr. Presidente Gustavo Petro Urrego</b> President of the Republic of Colombia <a href="mailto:contacto@presidencia.gov.co">contacto@presidencia.gov.co</a></p>	<p><b>Sra. Luz Adriana Camargo</b> Attorney General of Colombia <a href="mailto:despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co">despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co</a></p>
---	--

October 25, 2024

Dear President Petro and Attorney General Camargo:

We write to you today with a deep sense of urgency and sorrow following the assassination of **Heber Rivera Méndez**, a respected community leader from the Venus district of Tuluá, Valle del Cauca Department.


On the early morning of September 24, armed men stormed the home of Heber Rivera Méndez, shooting him multiple times and tragically ending his life. His death leaves behind a void in the local community, where he was a pivotal figure advocating for peasant farmer rights, human rights, and social justice. He served as president of both the Communal Action Board of the Venus district and the Association of Peasant Workers of Valle del Cauca (ASTRACAVA).

This heinous attack is not an isolated incident. It is part of a disturbing pattern of violence and threats against social leaders in Colombia. According to Indepaz (Institute for the Study of Development and Peace), more than 121 social leaders have been murdered in 2024 alone. Despite promises of a total peace from the government, illegal armed groups such as dissident groups of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (e.g., the 57th Front and the Adán Izquierdo Block) continue to impose norms and social control, targeting those who defend human rights. The risk faced by social leaders has been clearly outlined in early warnings issued by the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman, but the violence persists unchecked.

The time for action is now, before more lives are lost and the hope for peace further fades. We therefore strongly urge you to:

- conduct a full and transparent investigation into the assassination of Heber Rivera Méndez, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- increase protection measures for social leaders in Tuluá and across Colombia, particularly in
- areas with high activity from illegal armed groups
- implement tangible measures to dismantle illegal armed groups
- guarantee the safety and human rights of all citizens, especially those working in social and political leadership

Sincerely,

  
Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinators

  
Christine L. Stonebraker-Martínez

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  
UN: Juliette De Rivero, Representative in Colombia of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ~ 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:**