

Excmo. Sr. Presidente Gustavo Petro Urrego President of the Republic of Colombia contacto@presidencia.gov.co	Sra. Luz Adriana Camargo Attorney General of Colombia despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co
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October 26, 2024

Dear President Petro and Attorney General Camargo:

We write to you today out of grave concern for **René Alfonso Garavito**, an Indigenous Makaguan leader and university student from Fortul municipality, Arauca Department.

On September 20, three armed men approached René Alfonso Garavito as he was traveling between Tame (Arauca Department) and Hato Corozal (Casanere Department) with his 11-year-old nephew. The men held him at gunpoint, tied him up and took him away while his nephew watched. According to his family members, he is being held by the National Liberation Army (ELN), an illegal armed group responsible for the kidnapping of Afro-Colombian leader John Jairo Jimenez earlier this year. His sister reports that several months ago, René Alfonso Garavito was apprehended and interrogated by armed men in the woods in the early morning.


René Alfonso Garavito, a valued community member, is a student of the Public Administration program at the Escuela Superior de Administración Pública (ESAP) in Tame. René Alfonso Garavito is also the father of two 6-year-old children and a 16-year-old teenager, who await his prompt return. His relatives are experiencing much distress and anguish, especially his 11-year-old nephew, who now has routine nightmares after watching the kidnapping.

René Alfonso Garavito serves his community as an active member of the Indigenous Guard at the Reserve Cusay la Colorada. The Makaguan people are one of four distinct Indigenous tribes living in Arauca, organized through ASCATIDAR (Association of Traditional Indigenous Cabildos and Authorities of Arauca) and ASOCATA (Association of Traditional Authorities in Arauca). ASOCATA is affiliated with CENPAZ (National Ethnic Coordinating Body for Peace), which is active in implementing the ethnic peoples' provisions of the 2016 Peace Accords. The leadership of the Makaguan people has previously been targeted; Magdalena Cucubana, a Makaguna leader, was assassinated in September 2019.

Given the pattern of escalated violence against Indigenous peoples, we strongly urge you to:

- encourage negotiators at the peace talks with the ELN to denounce this violation and ensure the release of René Alfonso Garavito
- conduct a thorough investigation into the kidnapping of René Alfonso Garavito, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- consult with members of the Makaguan tribe to provide them with appropriate protection measures
- guarantee that all Indigenous peoples are able to carry out their daily activities without fear for their lives

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
Arif Bulkan, Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 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

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