

## **Joint statement to condemn the use of violence against communities in Colombia and on their legitimate right to a decent life and to protest**

Rome, 10 October 2017

We, the undersigned, express our profound grief and dismay at the increase in violence against social leaders and human rights defenders in Colombia. Since the peace agreement with FARC was signed, violence rates have been on the increase: 51 cases of murder, 32 assaults, 18 arbitrary detentions and 9 cases of judicial processes ("Programa Somos Defensores", June 2017). Within the same timeframe, over 200 social leaders have been murdered ("Cumbre Agraria Campesina Étnica y Popular", October 2017).

Adding to this shameful list, a further 8 people were murdered last week in the Nariño department, following the national government's policy of forced eradication of coca crops, which does not comply with the established provision in the peace accords regarding voluntary eradication – with guarantees – and is a violation of fundamental rights. This situation has been aggravated by the police attack on the UN /OAS / Ombudsman humanitarian commission during their enquiry, and by the murder of Efigenia Vasquez, an Indigenous communicator, at the hands of the Mobile Anti-riot Squadron in the Cauca Department, and the death of the community leader, Jorge Luis García, at his home in Cartagena.

Clearly, the country is facing a serious situation, with consequences that could deeply affect the social, cultural and environmental structures. What is at stake is the chance to build a new country that addresses conditions of inequality, injustice and exclusion, which have essentially fed the conflict in its many forms.

Social organisations, movements and processes have shown their will in advancing towards the implementation of the peace accords signed by FARC. The Colombian government must guarantee the conditions for a truly effective participation, by complying with the commitments made in international agreements and covenants on human rights, collective rights and environmental care and protection.

We call for the further implementation of the Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, and for the rights of peasants, rural workers, indigenous peoples and afro-descendants to be taken into account. We also call for the guarantee of economic, social and cultural rights of communities as they legitimately defend, build and take ownership of their territories, which guarantee their social reproduction as a group, people or community. We therefore join the 'week of outrage' between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of October, coordinated by social movements in Colombia to reject the criminalization and murder of social leaders and human rights defenders.

We still believe in peace, dialogue and reconciliation, but in a peace that does not leave behind different popular social sectors, and that recognises their differences and the potential that lies behind the proposals they have been building for years, even in the midst of war. We urge international organisations, social movements and guarantor states that have closely followed this process, to continue walking on this path towards peace, including in the current dialogues with ELN.

This statement is supported by:

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