



National Education Union

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Joint General Secretaries
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27 November 2020

Ambassador Antonio José Ardila
Embassy of Colombia
3 Hans Crescent
London
SW1X 0LN

Email: elondres@cancilleria.gov.co

Subject: Murders of Colombian Teachers

Dear Ambassador,

The National Education Union, Europe's largest teacher trade union, condemns the murders of two more Colombian teachers, Byron Revelo Insuasty and Douglas Cortés Mosquera, over the weekend of 21-22 November. During Kevin Courtney's meeting with you and Justice for Colombia (JFC) in October, the NEU expressed our concerns regarding human rights and trade unionism in Colombia, issues which remain highly urgent given the current situation.

Since the NEU was established in 2017 we have supported the defence of trade unionism, human rights and peace in Colombia. Our predecessor unions NUT and ATL also campaigned through JFC. Our members have met with Colombian trade unionists in both Colombia and Britain on several occasions, including a virtual meeting in July with the FECODE teachers' union. In addition, NEU Joint-General Secretary Mary Bousted is a member of the JFC governing committee.

On 22 November, two teachers were confirmed killed in separate incidents. The body of Byron Revelo Insuasty was found in Tumaco, days after he was abducted while travelling to vote in elections for his trade union, SIMANA. Douglas Cortés Mosquera, a member of the SER trade union, was also murdered in Risaralda. SIMANA and SER are affiliated to FECODE.

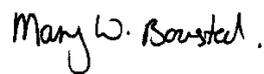
According to information provided by FECODE to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, over 1,000 teachers were murdered in Colombia between 1986 and 2010. That violence has continued since the signing of the 2016 peace agreement, with FECODE reporting 25 teachers murdered between the start of 2018 and February 2020. Since then, more teachers have been killed, including Jairo de Jesús Jiménez in April and Candelaria Acendra Salcedo in May. On 4 November, the NEU wrote to President Duque following threats made against FECODE's executive committee and the CUT.

It is extremely alarming that, amid high levels of violence towards teachers, FECODE has warned that senior members of the governing Democratic Centre are stigmatising its trade union activity. In just two recent examples, on 20 November Senator Carlos Felipe Mejía tweeted 'FECODE is not educating but indoctrinating,' while on 23 November Senator María Fernanda Cabal tweeted 'FECODE's aggression is

against the children of the poor.' With teachers literally being killed in Colombia, such reprehensible and baseless discourse appears calculated to inflame public hostility towards FECODE and delegitimise its campaigning for improved conditions in the public education system.

We urge President Duque to denounce the dangerous discourse emanating from members of his party and to provide public guarantees over the democratic right to trade union activity. We also hope that the government will ensure that thorough investigations into the murders of our colleagues Byron Revelo Insuasty and Douglas Cortés Mosquera take place and bring justice to their families.

Yours sincerely,



Mary Boustead
Joint General Secretary



Kevin Courtney
Joint General Secretary

Copied to:

Wendy Morton MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Americas
Ambassador Colin Martin-Reynolds, British Ambassador to Colombia
Rosario Herrera, Human Rights Attaché, Embassy of Colombia to the UK
Federación Colombiana de Educadores, FECODE
Justice for Colombia