



Colin Martin-Reynolds CMG
UK Ambassador to Colombia
Carrera 9, No 76-49, Piso 8
Edificio ING Barings,
Bogotá
Colombia

21 April 2021

Dear Ambassador,

CONDEMN TARGETED VIOLENCE AGAINST COLOMBIAN TEACHERS

As the Joint General Secretaries of the National Education Union (UK), we urge you to join us in condemning the aggressive targeting of Colombian teacher Sandra Ximena Caicedo.

The abuse experienced by Ms Caicedo is despicable and dangerous. Ms Caicedo has been subjected to attacks on the back of asking pupils to discuss and explore issues relating to the armed conflict in Colombia and the investigations conducted by transitional justice entities that were created in the 2016 peace agreement. The exercise set by Ms Caicedo asked students to consider the role of former president Álvaro Uribe in the so-called 'False Positives' scandal. According to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the Colombian military murdered at least 6,402 civilians between 2002 and 2008, during the government of Álvaro Uribe.

All education systems have a critical role in ensuring that young people can engage with, scrutinise, and ask questions about complex political and social issues. As Europe's largest education trade union, we stand in solidarity with Ms Caicedo and defend her right to freedom from violence – as with all Colombians.

Amid ongoing and longstanding violence against Colombian trade unionists and social leaders, the smears against Ms Caicedo are reprehensible. We note the hostility towards Ms Caicedo has been promoted by Senator María del Rosario Guerra of Mr Uribe's Democratic Centre (CD) party, who accused Ms Caicedo of acting 'without the minimum professional ethic or informative rigour.' Ms Caicedo's photograph was also circulated on social media in an apparent attempt to generate a climate of threat towards her.

Such discourse serves to legitimise aggression towards teachers at a time when they face alarming violence: at least four Colombian teachers have been murdered since November 2020, while FECODE (the Federation of Colombian teachers) says more than 30 teachers have been killed since the start of 2018. This climate of violence has been heightened previously by Senators María Fernanda Cabal and Carlos Felipe Mejía who attacked FECODE with baseless claims that it seeks to indoctrinate children and to harm those from low-income backgrounds.

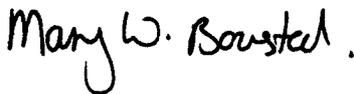
The NEU is proud to support FECODE's important efforts to improve conditions for workers and students in the public education system, as well as its defence of human rights and peace. Alongside FECODE and Justice for Colombia, the NEU will continue to campaign in support of Colombian trade unionism, human rights, and peace.

As the UK's Ambassador to Colombia, we ask that you:

- Make representations to the relevant authorities regarding the importance of protection for Colombian teachers
- Emphasise the dangerous nature of slurs against teachers by members of the Democratic Centre in your representations to the Colombian government
- Lead the UK Embassy to make a public statement denouncing attacks against FECODE members and Colombian teachers

We look forward to your reply.

Yours Sincerely,



Mary Boustead
Joint General Secretary



Kevin Courtney
Joint General Secretary

cc: Ambassador Antonio José Ardila, Colombian Ambassador to the UK
Federación Colombiana de Trabajadores de la Educación (FECODE)
Justice for Colombia