

Nancy Gutiérrez Castañeda
Presidential Commissioner for Human Rights and International Affairs
Calle 7 No. 6-54
Casa Republicana
Bogota
Colombia

14 September 2021

Dear Commissioner,

I am writing on behalf of 1.4 million members of Britain and Ireland's Unite the Union to express our extreme concern over the murder of yet another trade unionist affiliated to our sister union in Colombia, FENSUAGRO. We are appalled that attacks on FENSUAGRO members, as well as on other trade unionists and social leaders in Colombia, have continued despite repeated warnings.

Unite partners with FENSUAGRO through the international trade union organisation, Workers Uniting, and our members have met with FENSUAGRO trade unionists on delegations to Colombia organised by the British-Irish organisation, Justice for Colombia. We strongly support FENSUAGRO's important work to strengthen labour rights and improve social conditions in rural communities.

On 29 August, married trade unionists María López Cerdón and Rigoberto Cabanzo Arévalo were attacked in Caño Lindo, Meta. María was killed while Rigoberto was injured. Both belonged to the SINTRAGRIM agricultural workers union of Meta, which is affiliated to FENSUAGRO. Earlier in August, Roberto Moises Suaza of the FENSUAGRO-affiliated ASIMTRACAMPIC received threats.

In its most recent Global Rights Index, which documents anti-union abuses around the world, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) once again named Colombia the world's most dangerous country for trade unionists, with 22 murdered between March 2020 and April 2021. Most victims have yet to see justice, with the ITUC emphasising that the Colombian government has 'failed to allocate the necessary means for the timely investigation and prosecution of the cases.'

At least five of the 22 victims – Jayder Quintana, Hamilton Gasca Ortega (killed alongside his two young sons), Erminso Trochez Ilamo, Nelson Ramos Barrera and Omar Moreno – were affiliated to FENSUAGRO. Around 35 FENSUAGRO-affiliated trade unionists have been murdered since the 2016 peace agreement was signed. Unfortunately, these clear dangers do not appear to have elicited an urgent response from the current administration.

Of course, anti-union violence in Colombia is not new. The National Trade Union School (ENS) registers 3,240 trade unionists murdered from 1971 to 2018. Yet despite decades of government knowledge of aggression towards trade unionists, the killings continue. The ongoing attacks compel us to directly address the current administration's incapacity to ensure the protection of trade unionists and the right of Colombian workers to organise for fairer conditions. One of our most significant concerns in this regard is the failure to fully implement a public policy aimed at dismantling paramilitary-successor and other armed groups as stipulated by the peace agreement.

Unite the Union stands alongside all Colombian trade unionists to demand their labour, social and human rights are protected and strengthened. We call on the government to provide all necessary resources for thorough investigations into apprehending the intellectual authors and material perpetrators of these crimes. We also urge the government to ensure that any pending petitions for protective measures from trade unionists and social leaders are processed with immediate effect and that maximum efforts are made to advance implementation of the peace agreement during this last year of presidency.

We thank you very much for your time and attention.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Graham', with a horizontal line underneath.

Sharon Graham
General Secretary, Unite the Union

C.C. Federación Nacional Sindical Unitaria Agropecuaria (FENSUAGRO)
Justice for Colombia