



Juan David Correa

Minister of Culture and Minister of Education ad hoc
Ministry of Culture
Calle 9 #8-31
Bogota
Colombia

c.c.

Ministry of Education

Trade Union Association for University Professors, ASPU

Mixed Workers Trade Union of National Public Universities, SINTRAUNAL

Justice for Colombia

29 May 2024

Dear Minister,

As general secretary of Britain and Northern Ireland's largest trade union for university and college workers, the University and College Union (UCU), I am writing with regards to the recent election of a new rector at the National University in Bogota.

Since the election of the Historic Pact coalition of President Gustavo Petro two years ago, our union has been heartened by the government's efforts to strengthen worker rights, guarantee trade union security and tackle inequality through its social reform bills. We also welcome the focus on peacebuilding through dialogue that seeks to end violent conflict.

UCU represents more than 125,000 lecturers, researchers and professional services staff in the further and higher education sectors. Through our work with the trade union campaign organisation Justice for Colombia, we have developed strong relations with trade unions in Colombia, including the Trade Union Association for University Professors (ASPU) and the CUT trade union federation. We have also campaigned in support of the 2016 peace agreement, as well as for justice for victims of state violence and an end to aggression towards trade unionists.

We note recent actions by ASPU and the SINTRAUNAL union for National University employees in response to their concerns about the rector election at the UNAL in Bogota. The clear preferred choice in the democratic vote undertaken by university staff, students and graduates was Leopoldo Munera with 34% of the vote, by far the highest among the five candidates. However, the Superior University Council, an unelected body, appointed José Peña to the role, despite Mr Peña obtaining only 8% of votes. This appears to raise

legitimate questions over the democratic process in one of Latin America's most important higher education institutions.

UCU notes the calls of trade unions and student organisations for the views of the university community to be respected. As students and workers in public universities face sharply rising living costs and fewer economic opportunities, it is vital to ensure that decision-making processes are transparent and autonomous of external pressures. We respectfully encourage your ministry to address ASPU and SINTRAUNAL's petitions around the UNAL rector election. Furthermore, we ask that the fundamental right to freedom of assembly and peaceful protest on university campuses is fully protected.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Grady'. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr Jo Grady
General Secretary, UCU