

URGENT ACTION

REPRESSION AGAINST PEOPLE PROTESTING

Since 28 April, thousands of people took the streets across the country calling for the withdrawal of a tax reform and for better social and economic measures in a national strike (“Paro Nacional”) called by several social movements. The authorities responded by deploying the military to several cities, publicly stigmatizing protestors, and crushing protests with excessive use of force, including with weapons causing dozens of deaths, and hundreds of injured, arbitrarily detained and disappeared. We call on the President to guarantee the people’s right to peaceful assembly.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Mr. Iván Duque
President of the Republic of Colombia
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President Duque,

I write you to express my deepest concern for the violent response that your government is giving to people protesting on the streets calling for better social and economic measures developed in an open and fruitful dialogue with the society as a whole to address the many challenges Colombia faces nowadays.

According to Colombian Civil Society Organizations, since the start of the “Paro Nacional”, and until 4 May 2021, the deployment of the military, police forces and the anti-riot squad (ESMAD) to repress protests caused 31 deaths, 216 people injured, and 814 arbitrary detentions. There are also reports of acts of sexual violence, and the office of the Ombudsperson published a list with 87 people disappeared in the context of the protests.

These human rights violations are nothing new in similar situations that happened in the recent past of the country, and it is time to stop them. Problems in Colombia will not go away by trying to suppress the voices of the people who should have a say in how the country recovers and flourishes after these difficult times.

As the highest authority in Colombia, I call you to end the stigmatization of social protest and give a clear order to stop repression. You have the obligation to guarantee an enabling environment where the people’s right to peaceful assembly is fully respected, by condemning and deescalating the violent response from law enforcement officers against people protesting, and making sure that all human rights violations taking place in the context of the recent protests are fully investigated and sanctioned.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A national strike “Paro Nacional” started on 28 April, triggered by a tax reform proposal from the President Duque aimed at increasing tax revenues to face the economic crisis after a year of economic slowdown out of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemics in the country.

The “Paro Nacional” was also retaking several demands from the Colombia society expressed in similar protests in late 2019, such as measures to stop the killing of social leaders, the fulfillment of the Peace Accords, an accessible, safe and comprehensive health system, and a thorough police reform, among others.

On 1 May, the [president announced](#) a military presence in “urban centers where there is a high risk to the integrity of citizens”, and stated: “I want to issue a clear warning to those who, through violence, vandalism and terrorism, seek to intimidate society and think that by this mechanism they will break the institutions”. On 5 May, the [president also said](#) “The vandalism threat we face consists of a criminal organization that hides behind legitimate social aspirations” and added “The extreme vandalism and urban terrorism we are observing is financed and articulated by drug trafficking mafias”.

Since the beginning of the “Paro Nacional” several mobilizations in key cities like Bogotá, Cali, and Pasto were met by excessive use of force, including armed and lethal force, deriving into 31 persons killed, 216 injured and 814 arbitrarily detained. There are also concerning reports of acts of sexual violence and people disappeared.

Amnesty International [verified videos](#) where the Colombian police used lethal weaponry as well as indiscriminate use of less lethal weapons such as tear gas, water cannons and other materials against demonstrators in several parts of the country.

This pattern of repression to protests for this year’s “Paro Nacional” mimics that seen on the protests in 2019, when several people were killed after been shot with tear gas-grenades and firearms with live and potentially lethal ammunition, and other protests in late 2020 when the National Police reported that 403 people were injured, among them 194 members of the security forces, and 10 people were killed in the context of protests in response to the lawyer Javier Ordonez’s killing by the police.

Several investigations for crimes committed by the law enforcement officers in the context of protests are on their way, but the fact that human rights violations committed by police keep being investigated by military justice jurisdiction, such as the case of Dilan Cruz killed during a protest in 2019, impedes tangible progress towards achieving truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition to the victims, their relatives and the society.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 30 June 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: People Protesting in Colombia (they, them)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: n/a

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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