

URGENT ACTION

PROTECT CISCA FROM ATTACKS

On 25 September, the commander of the FARC's 33rd Front publicly and directly stigmatised the Catatumbo Social Integration Committee (CISCA) and its members. These statements are unjustified and unacceptable, while also pose a serious threat to human rights defenders and social leaders who have historically been subjected to violence and stigmatisation. Today, the FARC's 33rd Front is engaged in peace dialogues with Colombian authorities. We urge the Peace Commissioner Councilperson to place human rights at the core of these dialogues and to call on the armed group to cease attacks against CISCA and all human rights defenders and social leaders.

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

Consejero Comisionado de Paz
José Otty Patiño Hormaza
Calle 7 No. 6-54, Bogotá
Email: contacto@presidencia.gov.co.
X: @ComisionadoPaz

Dear Mr. Peace Commissioner Councilman,

I am writing to express my deep concern about the serious risks to the life, safety, and security of the civilian population in the Catatumbo region of Colombia, particularly human rights defenders and members of local civil society organisations. On 25 September, the commander of the FARC's 33rd Front publicly and directly stigmatized the Catatumbo Social Integration Committee (CISCA), a historic human rights defence and civil society organization, stating that they are involved with other armed groups actions in the region.

This attack comes in a context of armed confrontations between armed groups in the Catatumbo and continued stigmatizing discourse against human rights defenders and social leaders in the region. Being singled out by an armed group pose a serious risk for any person in Colombia, moreover in a region where armed conflict is active and human rights defenders and social leaders have been subjected to human rights violations and abuses for decades. Meanwhile, Colombian authorities are in peace negotiations with the FARC's 33rd Front.

In recent years, and especially since the outbreak of the current violent crisis in mid-January, local civil society organisations in Catatumbo, including CISCA, have consistently called for peace, respect for international humanitarian law, and structural solutions based on a stronger presence of civilian State institutions, as outlined in the recently signed Social Pact for the Territorial Transformation of Catatumbo.

I urge you take immediate action, in the context of the peace negotiations being currently held, to call FARC's 33rd Front to retract its stigmatising attacks against CISCA and refrain from further attacks or escalating its actions against them.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Located in the north-east of Colombia, in the Norte de Santander department, the Catatumbo region stretches between the Eastern Andes and the vicinities of Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela. This is a region rich in natural resources, particularly oil, and where extreme poverty, high levels of militarization and violence, and the lack of access to health, food, education, water and housing have created a hostile environment for social leadership and human rights defence activities. Furthermore, the region lacks infrastructure and connection with the rest of Colombia and remains as one of the primary enclaves of coca leaf crops and cocaine production in the country.

Amnesty International has followed the situation of violence against human rights defenders in the region for several years, focusing on the Catatumbo Social Integration Committee (CISCA). Since 2020, Amnesty International has pointed out that CISCA's human rights work has been hindered by two major collective risks factors: [high levels of violence in its area of influence, particularly against those in position of social leadership, and the activities of forced eradication of coca leaf crops](#). Amnesty International has also recognised that extreme poverty and lack of access to economic and social rights create a tense and hostile environment in the region, particularly for social leaders. By July 2023, Colombian authorities had ceased the coca leaf forced eradication operations and military activity relatively decreased in the region, both by State security forces and armed groups, but [the long history of militarisation and the humanitarian impact after years of armed conflict had not yet enabled safe conditions for social mobilisation and human rights work, since armed groups activities continued, even intensified, in neighbouring areas](#).

Since mid-January 2025, armed confrontations erupted between the National Liberation Army (ELN in Spanish) and dissident groups of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP in Spanish) under the name of General Staff of Blocks and Front (EMBF in Spanish), among them the FARC's 33rd Front, seriously affecting the civilian population. On 18 January the Ombudsperson's Office reported 60 killings in Convención, Ábrego, Teorama, El Tarra, Hacarí and Tibú municipalities, forced displacements of Indigenous Peoples and peasant communities, and highlighted the special risk faced by human rights defenders, social leaders and former members of the FARC-EP demobilized in 2016, given public statements made by the ELN against them. By 18 February, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported approximately 80.000 people affected (including at least 47.000 children and 4.600 Venezuelan refugees), 52.000 of which were forcibly displaced 8.600 remained forcibly confined. The UNHCR stated that confrontations between armed groups and between them and Colombian security forces continued, risking further killings, massive forced displacements, forced confinements, and enforced disappearances.

Colombian authorities claim that their priority is protecting the civilian population and carried out emergency evacuation efforts. Human rights organisations of Catatumbo and at the national level have warned about the risk of a militarised response to this crisis, making calls for peace, for the respect of International Humanitarian Law, and for President Petro to support and implement structural solutions based on a stronger presence of civilian state institutions, such as the [Social Pact for the Territorial Transformation of Catatumbo](#), discussed during the last two years between state representatives and local civil society, and finally signed in Catatumbo on 6 March.

However, in a national cabinet meeting broadcasted on national television on 3 March to announce the 6 March event in Catatumbo, President Petro' stigmatised the social organisations of the region saying they are "permeated" and "subordinated" to the armed groups, putting them at high risk. Armed groups frequently accuse local civil society of collaborating with rival factions to justify attacks against them. Furthermore, stigmatisation at the local level against social organisations has been increasing in social networks in the last weeks. On 25 September the armed group 33rd Front of the FARC publicly and directly stigmatized CISCA and its members. In a region where human rights defence activities imply great risk for people and communities, being singled out by an armed group leave them in a very precarious situation that needs to be addressed by the authorities.

Since the beginning of the crisis, Amnesty International has called for the protection of the civilian population through a first [Urgent Action](#) and a [Public Statement](#) and for the President to halt stigmatizing discourse against civil society organizations in the region through a second [Urgent Action](#).

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 31 December 2025.

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

NAME: CISCA [they / them]

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr23/8941/2025/en/>;
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr23/9102/2025/en/>.

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

His Excellency Mr Roy Leonardo Barreras-Montealegre

Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary

Embassy of Colombia

3 Hans Crescent SW1X 0LN

020 7589 9177 / 020 7589 5037

elondres@cancilleria.gov.co

<https://reinounido.embajada.gov.co/>

Salutation: Your Excellency