Statement by the Colombia section in response to attacks against social protest

May 2021

“This statement was approved by the membership of the Colombia section of the Latin American Studies Association. Approval of this statement was made by a vote of the Colombia section of 60 of the 107 people eligible in the section to vote. This is not a policy statement of the Latin American Studies Association, which neither endorses nor rejects the statements expressed”.

Colombia is experiencing a moment of social unrest unlike any other in recent decades. The unease caused by the tax reform bill proposed by the government of Iván Duque triggered a tidal wave of protests that have brought to light a widespread social, economic, and institutional crisis. After fifteen days of protests, violence of all kinds has been unleashed against the protestors, leaving to date more than 47 casualties, 548 missing and hundreds injured nationwide.

The Colombian scholars affiliated with the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), Colombia section, wish to condemn the abuses of all kinds that the Colombian Armed Forces and Police, as shock forces of the government, have committed against the people of the country. As scholars of Colombia, deeply interested in the country, we view with great concern the lack of a serious dialogue from the government, offering real options to change the situation of millions of impoverished Colombians and to allow opportunities to address the justified demands of urban youth, students, indigenous people, workers, Afro-descendants, and other popular sectors.

Over the past few days, colleagues from universities abroad studying Colombia, professors, and students at various universities in the country, as well as several international organizations, have expressed through several statements their deep concern about the current crisis and the violence against those exercising their right to protest. In addition, they have rejected and called for the clarification of responsibilities for the increasing number of people who have been killed, who have disappeared, and who have been sexually assaulted; this violence has particularly been directed against young people and indigenous people.

The Colombians affiliated with the LASA, the largest association of scholars in the world who study our region, want to attract the attention of the new government of the United States, home country of our association and crucial element in the recent history of Colombia, to promote in a peaceful and effective way a broad dialogue, with real solutions for the protestors, while stimulating within the Colombian government a structural review of its public force, an institution that should be trained for peace and not for war. Furthermore, we join the demand by multiple human rights organizations to the U.S. government to desist from any type of assistance, training, or sale of weapons, equipment, and military services to the Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron (ESMAD) and other military forces in
Colombia. Instead, it is necessary to join institutional efforts in Colombia and internationally to ensure that the government of Iván Duque fully and faithfully implements the peace treaties.

As other scholars have done within and outside Colombia, we offer our good services to nurture the dialogue between the parties and reach productive agreements and peaceful solutions for the country.

Signed:

Angélica Bernal Olarte, Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano/Co-chair, LASA-Colombia
Irene Vélez-Torres, Universidad del Valle/Co-chair, LASA-Colombia
Franz Hensel, Universidad del Rosario/Co-chair, LASA-Colombia
María del Pilar File-Muriel, University of New Mexico/Secretary, LASA-Colombia
Sandra Sánchez López, Universidad de los Andes, board LASA-Colombia
Felipe Martínez Pinzón, Brown University, board LASA-Colombia
Roxani Krystalli, University of St Andrews
Jean Jackson, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
William Aviles, University of Nebraska at Kearney
Olga Arbelaez, Saint Louis University
James Sanders, Utah State University
Marta Zambrano, Universidad Nacional de Colombia
Sandra C. Alvarez, Chapman University
Carlos Agudelo, Université de Paris
Nathalia Hernández Vidal, University of North Texas
Eduardo Sáenz Rovner, Universidad Nacional de Colombia
Gwen Burnyeat, University of Oxford
Rocio Rueda Ortiz, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional
Thomas J. Williford, Southwest Minnesota State University
Catalina Arango C., Carnegie Mellon University
Gabriel Ignacio Gómez Sánchez, Universidad de Antioquia
Meri Clark, Western New England University
Ana María Díaz Burgos, Oberlin College
Diana Paola Guzmán, Universidad Jorge Tadeo Colombia
Sebastián Ramírez H., Princeton University
Jamie Shenk, University of Oxford
Catalina Esguerra, University of Virginia
Mary Roldán, CUNY Hunter College
Laura Correa Ochoa, Harvard University, PhD Candidate
Kristina Mani, Oberlin College
Nancy Deffebach, independent scholar
Jonathan Tittler, Rutgers University
Angela J. Lederach, Creighton University/Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology
María Inés Martínez, University of Manitoba, Canadá
Monica Amador-Jiménez, Research Associate University of Bristol
Gilberto Gómez, Wabash College
Manuela Ruiz Reyes, Universidad Externado de Colombia
Manuela Trindade Viana, IRI/PUC-Rio
Andrea Fanta, Florida International University
Joanne Rappaport, Georgetown University
Anastasia Bermudez, Universidad de Sevilla / LASA-Colombia
Jorge Enrique Horbath Corredor, El Colegio de la Frontera Sur
Gisselle Vila Benites, Clark University
Michael Soto, Universidad de Minnesota
Amanda M. Smith, University of California, Santa Cruz
Juanita Aristizabal, Pitzer College
Cherilyn Elston, University of Reading
Francisco A. Ortega, Profesor Titular, Universidad Nacional de Colombia
Liliana Gómez, University of Zurich
Oscar Aponte, City University of New York
Robert Karl, Minerva Schools at KGI
Mathilda Shepard, University of Virginia
Bibiana Duarte Abadía, Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation. University of Amsterdam
Mauricio Archila, Universidad Nacional de Colombia
Diana Ramirez, Florida International University
Liisa L. North, York University
Carlos Abreu Mendoza, Texas State University
María Helena Rueda, Smith College
Felipe Gomez, Carnegie Mellon University
N. Carolina Bloem, Salt Lake Community College
R.A. Castiblanco Carrasco, Universidad Antonio Nariño, Universidad Externado de Colombia, Universidad del Rosario