

LASA urges Colombia to protect the lives of leaders, activists, and journalists

August 2018

The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) is greatly troubled by the increase in murders targeting human rights defenders, including social and community leaders and journalists, and urges the Colombian authorities to immediately begin a serious, impartial investigation into these deaths to determine who is responsible and punish the responsible parties according to its duties as a Social State subject to the rule of law.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has been drawing attention to this alarming human rights situation in Colombia since its report last year. The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) has registered 311 victims between 2016 and June 30, 2018. Organizations such as the Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz (Institute for Development and Peace Studies, INDEPAZ) have reported that 98 social leaders were assassinated in the first five months of 2018 and that the Colombian State's response to date has been weak.

LASA calls upon the incoming Government of Iván Duque Márquez to launch justice initiatives to address this violence targeting leaders, activists, and journalists and provide protection to these groups to safeguard their lives and their ability to conduct their work. LASA also urges the Colombian government to preserve the academic freedom of those who seek to clarify the truth of the armed conflict.

Research and knowledge-production activities focused on bringing light to the events of the armed conflict and defending the interests of those who have suffered most greatly from inequality and violence should continue without being subject to disparagements or limitations. LASA's mission includes fostering intellectual discussion, research, and teaching on Latin America, the Caribbean, and its people throughout the Americas and encouraging civic engagement through network building and public debate, and we express our full solidarity with our academic, journalist, and activist colleagues who are being intimidated or censored.

Historical background of the resurgence of violence

In 2012, peace negotiations between the Government of Juan Manuel Santos and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) were publicly announced. Delegations representing these parties and various sectors of civil society participated in the peace process. Additionally, the process had specialized forums for dealing with issues related to victims and transitional justice, such as the Historical Commission on the Conflict and its Victims and the Sub-Commission on Gender, which were made up of academics, researchers, and experts on topics related to Colombia. After four years of talks, the Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace was announced.

The final agreement included provisions for the ceasefire, the transition of ex-guerrilla fighters to civilian life, justice for the victims of the conflict, comprehensive rural reform, and political participation. Additionally, the accord included equity-based, territorial-based, ethnic-based, and gender-based approaches to address the diversity of victims in terms of their ethno-racial identity, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability status, religion, and rural/urban background. Because of this approach, the peace agreement was celebrated internationally by civil servants, multilateral cooperation agencies, and human rights organizations.

However, there has been a resurgence of violence despite the peace agreement. A wave of systemic assassinations of community leaders and social activists as well as threats to journalists, human rights defenders, and academics who are committed to critical thinking began in 2016. During the past year, this wave of violence has escalated and spread through all parts of Colombia.

LASA calls upon Colombia's new president, Iván Duque Márquez, to take measures to halt this violence and identify this problem as one of the main challenges faced by his government.

About LASA

The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) is the largest professional association in the world for individuals and institutions engaged in the study of Latin America. With over 12,000 members, over 65% of whom reside outside the United States, LASA is the one association that brings together experts on Latin America from all disciplines and diverse occupational endeavors, across the globe. LASA's mission is to foster intellectual discussion, research, and teaching on Latin America, the Caribbean, and its people throughout the Americas, promote the interests of its diverse membership, and encourage civic engagement through network building and public debate.

If you wish to interview a LASA Executive Council member, you can contact the LASA communications office at (412) 648-7929 or lasa@lasaweb.org.

LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

416 Bellefield Hall
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
lasa@lasaweb.org
Tel: 412-648-7929
Fax: 412-624-7145

