



Dear all,

Below you will find the security situations and human rights cases WOLA has received from March until April 16. We urge U.S. policymakers to raise concerns about the safety and security of human rights defenders, social leaders, and Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities at the May 28-29, 2024 High-Level US-Colombia Dialogue that will take place in Bogotá, Colombia.

At this meeting, the U.S. and Colombia should seek solutions to the security and protection challenges found throughout the country that disproportionately affected social leaders, Afrodescendants, Indigenous, and rural communities. Both countries should advance the aspects of the Ethnic Chapter of the 2016 peace accord that relates to individual, collective, and autonomous security measures. The Colombian government should be encouraged to make the security of communities a priority in the negotiations that are underway with the National Liberation Army (ELN) and FARC dissidents. On this, we reiterate our recommendation that the State Department designate an envoy to monitor Colombia's peace efforts. The two countries should work together to improve Colombia's Security and Citizen Coexistence policy prioritizes the protection of social leaders and vulnerable communities. Such a policy requires a differentiated ethnic, female, gender, and LGBTQ+ approach.

At the same time, concrete steps to protect citizens and address urban warfare are required in places such as Quibdó. Given ongoing internal displacement, it is recommended that Colombia improve its protection and assistance response to IDPs in the Pacific Coast, Antioquia, and Sur de Bolívar. Colombia's judicial authorities including the Attorney General and Inspector General should investigate, prosecute, and bring to justice the material and intellectual authors of the abuses detailed in this document.

Massacres

Three Women Killed and One Man Wounded (Bogotá)

On March 30, the Institute for the Study and Development of Peace (*Instituto para el Estudio y Desarrollo de Paz, Indepaz*) [reported](#) that three women were murdered and one man left injured in the San Isidro neighborhood in Bogotá. The body of the first woman led to the discovery of the bodies of two other women in a wooded area nearby. The man was found wounded in the same area. Illegal armed groups present in the area are the Golf Clan, (*Clan del Golfo, AGC*), Tren de Aragua, National Liberation Army (ELN), dissident group factions Front 33 of the Middle Magdalena Bloc, and other local gangs.

Two Nasa Indigenous Youth Killed (Cauca)

On March 9, Indepaz [reshared](#) the statement released by the Indigenous Council of Pitayó (*Cabildo Indígena de Pitayó*) denouncing the recent assassination of two Indigenous youth during a sports tournament and festival in the rural community of Asnega in Silvia, Cauca. Carlos Fredy Ramos Yonda and Christian Oswaldo Yosa Mesa were shot at by alleged members of the Dagoberto Ramos Front of the FARC Central General Staff (*Estado Mayor Central, EMC*).

Massacre Claims Lives of Four Afro-Colombians in Quibdó (Chocó)

On March 3, 2024, Indepaz [reported](#) that four people were killed and three more injured in the surroundings of a home in the Las Palmas neighborhood of Quibdó, the capital of the Chocó department. Quibdó is a predominantly Afro-Colombian city. While victims' identities remain unknown, authorities link the attack to clashes between illegal armed groups and local criminal gangs active in the area like the ELN, AGC, Los RPS, Los Mexicanos, and Los Locos Yam.

Killings of Social Leaders

Social Leader Narciso Beleño Killed (Bolívar)

On April 22, the Antioquia Division of the Europe-U.S.-Colombia Coordinator (*Nodo Antioquia – Coordinación Colombia Europa Estados Unidos, CCEEU*) [reported](#) the killing of social leader and farmer, Narciso Beleño. Beleño, who worked with the South Bolívar Agricultural and Mining Federation (*Federación Agrominera del Sur de Bolívar*), was killed while entering his home in the south of the Bolívar department. His death comes amidst an armed paramilitary advance in the region, which Beleño had denounced.

Community Leader Assassinated in Cartagena (Bolívar)

On April 19, Indepaz [reported](#) the assassination of a community leader and member of the Coexistence and Conciliation Commission of the Community Action Board (*La Comisión de Convivencia y Conciliación de la Junta de Acción Comunal*) in the Nuevo Bosque neighborhood of Cartagena, Jorge Navarro González. The 52-year-old was killed by hitmen on the morning of April 17 in a targeted attack. Illegal armed groups active in the city are the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC), Autodefensas Conquistadoras de la Sierra Nevada (ACSN), and local gangs such as Los Costeños.

Social Leader and Lawyer Murdered (North Santander)



On April 14, Indepaz [reported](#) that social leader and lawyer Jaime Alonzo Vásquez was assassinated. Jaime Alonzo Vásquez participated in numerous investigations of corruption in public entities. He was gunned down in a public establishment in the neighborhood of La Riviera in Cúcuta, North Santander. Illegal armed groups present in the area include the AGC, ELN, Front 33 of the Middle Magdalena Bloc of the EMC-FARC, and other local gangs.

Two Members of San José Peace Community Organization Murdered (Antioquia)

On March 19, the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó (*Comunidad de Paz San José de Apartadó*, CDP) [denounced](#) the murder of two community members in the town La Esperanza. The victims were the wife and minor brother of a leader of the peace community, who was interred at an Apartadó hospital at the time of the killings. Both were shot to death at a rural residence within the boundaries of the peace community. In conversations with members of the peace community, WOLA learned that community members are dissatisfied with the investigation into the crime, indicating that it took the Attorney General's Office (*Fiscalía General de la Nación*) eight days to arrive on the scene and collect evidence.

Female Indigenous Leader Murdered (Cauca)

On March 17, Indepaz [reported](#) that Indigenous elder and leader Carmelina Yule Paví was assassinated in Toribío, Cauca. Yule Paví was an artisan, coordinator of the territory's Indigenous women's employment program, community chief (*capitán*), fluent in the indigenous Nasa Yuwe language, and Indigenous guard (*Kiwe Thengna*). She was assassinated by the Dagoberto Ramos faction of the EMC-FARC. At the time of her killing, Yule Paví was engaged in efforts to secure the release of a minor from the community who had been kidnapped by that same armed faction.

Public Servant Assassinated (Cordobá)

On March 6, Indepaz [reported](#) that a public servant and mayoral secretary responsible for the administration of social programs, and municipality elder or peace advisor, Deivi Junco Hernández, was assassinated. Hernández had been shot, and his body was found in a public space in the Nueva Granada neighborhood of Santa Cruz de Lorica, Cordobá. Illegal armed groups present in the area are local gangs and the Golf Clan (*Clan del Golfo*, AGC).

Social Leader Josué Castellanos Murdered (Arauca)



On February 6, the Foundation for Observation and Research on Human Rights and Development (*Fundación para la Observación e Investigación en Derechos Humanos y el Desarrollo*, FOIDHD) [condemned](#) the killing of renowned social leader, human rights defender, and community leader Josué Castellanos Pérez, who was detained by an armed group and later assassinated. Castellanos Pérez was esteemed in the departments of Arauca and Tame for his work defending life, peace, territorial rights, and human rights. According to [Indepaz](#), the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN), the 10th and 28th Fronts of the Eastern Joint Command of the EMC-FARC (*Frentes 10 y 28 del Comando Conjunto del Oriente*), and local gangs operate in the region.

LGBTQ+ Rights Leaders Killed

LGBTIQ+ Social Leader Assassinated (Antioquia)

On April 17, Indepaz [reported](#) that LGBTQI+ social leader, and University of Antioquia professor, Manuel José Bermúdez Andrade, was assassinated. Andrade worked in the community on social outreach to promote rights and political participation. He was 58 years old, and his body was found in a rural zone in the municipality of Santo Domingo between March 6 and 8, after his family reported him as missing. His identity was confirmed on April 17. The AGC, Oficina del Valle de Aburrá, and local gangs are armed groups present in the area.

Caribe Afirmativo Launches 2023 Report on Violence Against LGBTQ+ People

On March 20, the LGBTQI organization Caribe Afirmativo [launched](#) their report “*Incontables: Sin registro, no hay memoria*” (Uncountable: Without Data, There Is no Memory) on violence against people of diverse sexual and gender identities in Colombia during 2023. A total of 156 killings of LGBTQ+ people took place in 2023, including 9 leaders of social or community movements, and 23 people killed in acts of prejudice. Hundreds of others were harassed, assaulted, or otherwise victimized. The report identified numerous deficiencies in the way the Office of the Attorney General (*Fiscalía General de la Nación*, FGN) classifies cases by identity. For example, in the case of Dania Sharith Polo “La Pola,” one of the most publicized killings of a trans person in Colombia in 2023, it was found that FGN classified her as a gay trans man.

While there has been progress in data collection since 2022, it is noteworthy that “ten months after the National Development Plan was approved, there have been no significant advances in the creation and conformation of the mechanism for the prevention and comprehensive care of violence and acts of discrimination against LGBTQ+ persons under the Ministry of Equality and



Equity.” The report calls on the international community and Colombian authorities to unite forces in building a safer and more tolerant climate in Colombia for LGBTQ+ people.

Death Threats and Attacks Against Social Leaders

Death Threats against the Association of Campesino Workers of Carare (Santander)

On April 18, the Northeast Division of the Europe-U.S.-Colombia Coordinator (*Coordinación Colombia Europa Estados Unidos*, CCEEU) [released](#) a statement denouncing the presence of an armed group identified as Autodefensas Nueva Generación or Self-Defense Forces New Generation. The group threatened to kill the president of the Association of Farmers Workers of Carare (*Asociación de Trabajadores Campesinos del Carare*, ATCC) and a local merchant in La India, Santander on April 2, 2024. The armed actors declared their intent to take control of the territory’s illicit markets to fund a campaign against the possible incursion of guerrilla fighters. The CCEEU condemns these death threats against social leaders and human rights defenders in the Santander region, stating that they are part of a systematic pattern of aggression and harassment.

Kidnapping of Indigenous Wayúu Politician (La Guajira)

The National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (*Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia*, ONIC) [reported](#) that on the night of April 9, a member of the Wayúu people, Juan Ricardo Martínez Alvarado “Apala” was kidnapped by an armed group in Manaure. Martínez Alvarado belongs to the Indigenous Association of La Guajira WAYA WAYUU, and is a municipal council member for the MAIS party. ONIC condemns this act as a violation of the rights of Indigenous peoples and undermines the political participation efforts of some members who are advocating for their struggles. They demand the prompt return of the kidnapped political leader and reiterate the commitment of the Wayúu people to non-violence.

Human Rights Defender Receives Death Threats on Facebook (Santander)

On April 7, the Node Northeast of the Colombia-Europe-United States Network (*Coordinación Colombia-Europa-Estados Unidos – Nodo Oriente*) [released](#) a statement condemning threats sent to the student leader, Jennifer Katherine López Barroso, via Facebook and expressed their solidarity. López Barroso is a member of the Permanent Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CPDH) Norte de Santander Chapter. The statement calls for an investigation into the threats, protection for López Barroso and the CPDH, and cooperation from human rights organizations to safeguard their lives and right to defend human rights.



Indigenous Guards Attacked (Cauca)

On March 19, the National Indigenous Guard of Colombia (*Guardia Indígena Nacional de Colombia*, ONIC) [released](#) a statement denouncing armed attacks against Indigenous communities and guards in the Toribío and Tacueyó Indigenous Reservations in Cauca. It highlights the critical situation of violence and criminal activities by armed groups against Indigenous peoples across various regions of the country. The statement calls for efforts from the government and armed actors to negotiate and advance peace processes. It demands the immediate withdrawal of armed groups from Indigenous territories, ending violence like recruitment, displacement, and threats to allow Indigenous communities to defend their lives and rights. The Indigenous groups state they are exhausted by the armed conflict and urge all sides to accelerate dialogue and demilitarization for total peace.

Attempted Assassination of Indigenous Guard with Explosive (Cauca)

On March 19, 2024, the Association of Indigenous Councils of North Cauca (*Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca*, ACIN) [released](#) a statement that an explosive device was placed in the vehicle of an Indigenous guard named Alver Cayapu Campo in the rural community of Alto de la Cruz in the Tacueyó Indigenous Reservation. This attack occurred amidst an ongoing humanitarian and territorial crisis in the municipality of Toribío, involving violence against Indigenous communities allegedly perpetrated by the Dagoberto Ramos Front of the EMC-FARC.

Social Leader Attacks and Assassinations (Nariño)

On March 9, both the Popular Unity Process of the Colombian Southwest (*Proceso de Unidad Popular del Suroccidente Colombiano*, PUPSOC) and the Association of Community Action Boards (*Asociación de Juntas de Acción Comunal*, ASOJUNTAS) of the Leiva municipality issued statements concerning the escalating violence and humanitarian crisis in the Nariño region.

The local action committees (*Juntas de Acción Comunal*, JAC) of Bajo Policarpa, Bajo Patía, and Leiva, represented by PUPSOC, voiced their distress and fear in response to the targeted attacks on community leaders and authorities by armed groups. They mourned the assassination of Segundo Imbachí in Leiva and urged collective efforts to strengthen peasant self-defense groups. They also appealed for increased state presence to ensure security and uphold human rights. Additionally, they called upon national and international organizations to monitor and address the critical humanitarian situation stemming from the ongoing armed conflict.



ASOJUNTAS, echoing similar concerns, expressed grave apprehension over the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the Cordillera subregion due to recent armed confrontations. These clashes, occurring for the past week, have resulted in the displacement of numerous families, including vulnerable individuals such as the elderly and disabled, from densely populated villages. ASOJUNTAS urgently implored authorities at all levels to take immediate and effective actions to mitigate the severe humanitarian emergency devastating their communities.

Afro-Colombian Female Leader At Risk in Buenaventura (Valle del Cauca)

In an email to WOLA on March 6, María Miyela Riascos Riascos, a human rights and environmental defender from the Buenaventura Civic Strike Movement (*Movimiento del Paro Cívico de Buenaventura*), reported concerning lapses in her state protection scheme that endanger her safety. Riascos Riascos, who has faced threats for her leadership, was contacted on March 5 by unknown individuals claiming to be her newly assigned bodyguards, raising alarms over potential security breaches. The vehicle transportation service assigned to her was withdrawn in February, limiting her mobility, while protection personnel have repeatedly failed to accompany her, leaving her stranded despite communicating these lapses. Riascos Riascos holds the National Protection Unit (*Unidad Nacional de Protección, UNP*) and Colombian government responsible for this, demanding accountability for the lack of guarantees.

Other Incidents and Abuses

Release of Social Leader (Valle del Cauca)

The CSPP Foundation (*Fundación CSPP*) shared (PDF) a statement celebrating the release of an individual named John Michael Cardona Jaramillo after 33 months of pretrial detention. The document, from an organization called the Committee in Solidarity with Political Prisoners (CSPP), states that Cardona Jaramillo was granted release in the legal case known as “Paso del Aguante” by a court in Cali, Colombia. It celebrates this as the sixth such release obtained by the prosecution against the youth involved in the major social unrest that occurred in the country in 2021. The CSPP will continue to support those unjustly detained and persecuted by authorities for participating in the widespread protests and national strike that year.

Thousands of Afro-Colombian Civilians Internally Displaced (Nariño)

On April 16, the organization Process of Black Communities (*Proceso de Comunidades Negras, PCN*) [denounced](#) that armed confrontations among paramilitary groups and fronts of the ELN and FARC dissidents had displaced or confined some 4,500 people in Nariño. The missive notes that a significant Afro-Colombian population recedes in the affected municipalities and is caught



in the deadly crossfire that includes the launching of explosive devices. PCN calls on the Colombian government to safeguard these communities facing threats from the fighting between armed groups active in the Pacific region.

Human Rights Violation Analysis (Arauca)

On April 8, the Observatory of Human Rights, Violence, and Conflict (*Observatorio de Derechos Humanos Violencia y Conflictividades*, ODHVC) released the report “Analysis of Human Rights Violations in Arauca during the year 2023.” The report covers escalating tensions, armed violence hotspots, human rights abuses like killings and forced displacement, the vulnerable situation of Indigenous communities due to the conflict, and the effects on civilian populations like restricted movement and access to basic services. The report concludes that urgent action is necessary to prevent an even worse human rights outlook in Arauca. Weak local institutions should be fortified, and the protection of civilian populations must be a priority in all conversations surrounding peace talks and bilateral ceasefires.

Anti-Personnel Mine Wounds Eight Civilians (Chocó)

On April 5, the General Community Council of San Juan (*Consejo Comunitario General del San Juan*, ACADESAN) [denounced](#) that on April 1, eight residents of the Sipí municipality were injured by an anti-personnel mine. The blast resulted in one local man losing a leg. The statement notes that the High Commissioner for Peace did not satisfactorily carry out community education programs on anti-personnel mines during 2022 and 2023. ACADESAN highlights the importance of a multilateral ceasefire to allow for sufficient demining in these territories.

Letter to President Gustavo Petro Regarding Railway Construction Project (Antioquia, Chocó)

On April 1, Somos Génesis, a network of dozens of Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and campesino organizations, [sent](#) an open letter to President Gustavo Petro regarding the construction of a 200-kilometer railway between the Turbo and Cupica municipalities. The goal of this project is to connect the Caribbean and Pacific, offering an alternative to the Panama Canal. Somos Génesis and their partners express their concern regarding the project. They highlight the lack of consultation with Afro-Colombians, Indigenous communities, and campesinos from the Bajo Atrato and Urabá regions regarding the project’s development, which is linked to regional and global economic projections. They recall previous episodes of violence, displacement, and human rights violations associated with similar projects. While not outright rejecting the

proposed railway, they request a meeting with President Gustavo Petro to engage in dialogue and address their concerns.

Differentiated Risks Facing LGBTQ+ Migrants in the Region

On March 24, Caribe Afirmativo [shared](#) a graphic explaining the risks faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in the Americas who migrate to other countries in the region. Armed groups operating on the margins of the conflict in Colombia control the migratory routes and take advantage of the vulnerability of these displaced persons. Migrants face dangers such as human trafficking, forced disappearance, forced recruitment, and labor exploitation in illicit crops and domestic services.

Barí Indigenous Communities Protest Risks to Territorial Integrity (Norte de Santander)

On March 22, the community organization Catatumbo Mothers of Peace (*Madres del Catatumbo por la Paz*) [shared](#) a joint statement from the Ñatubaiyibari Association of Traditional Authorities of the Bari People (*Asociación de Autoridades Tradicionales del Pueblo Bari – Ñatubaiyibari*) and the New Council of the Catalaura Karikachaboquira Reservation (*Nuevo Cabildo del Resguardo Catalaura Karikachaboquira*) released a joint statement. They expressed concerns about violations of rights faced by indigenous communities in Catatumbo, Colombia, stemming from the armed conflict and discriminatory colonial policies of the state.

While the councils support President Petro’s overall goals of total peace, they criticize the government’s approach to territorial planning and development initiatives that undermine indigenous self-determination and land rights. Namely, the councils protest the role of the Catatumbo Rural Workers’ Association (*Asociación Campesina del Catatumbo*, ASCAMAT) in presenting updates to the Action Plan for Regional Transformation that they consider violate Colombian law and the territorial rights of the Barí people. However, the statement affirms the community’s willingness to engage in dialogue and consultation processes regarding territorial matters, while upholding their constitutional rights to govern their ancestral lands according to their traditional practices.

Illegal Armed Group Kidnaps Child in Indigenous Community (Cauca)

On March 17, the Special High-Level Instance on Ethnic Peoples (*Instancia Especial de Alto Nivel Pueblos Étnicos*, IEANPE) [shared](#) a report from the Indigenous Nasa community of Toribío. They reported an armed attack by the Dagoberto Ramos Front on March 16, 2024, when armed individuals kidnapped a minor from an educational institution in the village of La Palma. The

community mobilized to rescue the minor, leading to an armed confrontation that resulted in injuries among community members, including leaders Carmelina Yule, Pamy, and Rodrigo Ul Muscue. The armed group claims to be “revolutionary” but demonstrates criminal behavior through kidnapping, armed assault on the community, and rejection of dialogue and peace efforts with the national government. The Nasa people express concerns over this attack being part of a planned extermination against their indigenous authorities and way of life, shattering their dreams of living in dignity amidst rampant violence from criminal armed groups in their territory.

Kidnapping Leads to Violent Assault on Indigenous Guard by Armed Group (Cauca)

On March 16, the Çxhab Wala Kiwe Association of Indigenous Councils of North Cauca (*Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca*) and the Network for the Defence of Life and Human Rights (Tejido de Defensa de la Vida y los Derechos Humanos) [reported](#) an armed attack against the community of Toribío, where armed individuals kidnapped a student from the Sesteadero Educational Institution. Members of the Indigenous guard confronted members of an armed group demanding the return of the youth to the community. In response, armed actors from the Dagoberto Ramos Front of the EMC threatened the community before attacking the territorial control post and firing indiscriminately. The community denounces these acts of violence that threaten their territory, security, and rights, calling for an end to such aggression against the civilian population by illegal armed actors.

Human Rights Organizations Denounce Paramilitary Violence (Antioquia)

On March 9, the Antioquia Division of the Europe-U.S.-Colombia Coordinator (*Nodo Antioquia – Coordinación Colombia Europa Estados Unidos, CCEEU*) [released](#) a joint statement made by communities of northeast Antioquia to denounce the advancement of paramilitary forces alongside public forces in their territory, which threatens their security and human rights. Over the last four years, tactics like assassination, social cleansing, extortion, and recruitment of youth have gripped much of the municipality of Yolombó, Antioquia. The statement cites specific incidents like the 2023 murder of a young educational leader in Yolombó as examples of the escalating violence. Paramilitaries have likewise sown fear in Anorí, while in Amalfi, a variety of armed groups are engaged in clashes over drug trafficking routes and finances.

Afro-Colombian Authorities Ask For Intervention to Prevent Internal Displacement (Nariño)

On March 6, the Afro-Colombian community councils of Magüí Payán, Nariño, La Voz de Los Negros, Manos Amigas del Patía Grande, Unión Patía Viejo, and La Amistad [reported](#)



displacement of communities since January 29. Those not displaced remain on high alert and at risk of displacement. The Afro-Colombian authorities call for intervention from municipal, departmental, national, and non-governmental organizations to address a worsening security situation in their communities and provide relief and support to those affected. Their statement does not identify the armed actor responsible for mass internal displacements in these communities.

We thank you in advance for taking action. Feel free to contact us at gsanchez@wola.org

Sincerely,

Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli

May 13, 2024