



## Urgent Appeal for the Protection of Lives of Communities and Leaders in Southern Bolivar

Social, regional, and national organisations, alongside international protection agencies in Colombia, as well as cooperation NGOs working within Colombia, firmly denounce the assassination of Narciso Beleño, which occurred in Santa Rosa del Sur on Sunday, April 21, 2024. Narciso was a respected leader within the farming community, serving as president of the Southern Bolívar Agromining Federation. He dedicated himself to leading the struggle of communities in Southern Bolívar and the Magdalena Medio to achieve a dignified life free from the impacts of violence. His relentless efforts for peace and social justice have left the residents of the region deeply troubled.

We observe with deep concern the recent violent incursion by the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces of Colombia into the southern Bolívar subregion, as reported by social organisations, media outlets, and authorities over the past week and a half. Narciso's murder adds to a series of aggressions, including arbitrary detentions and murders in the municipalities of Morales and Arenal. On April 21, approximately 150 people from the communities of Micoahumado and other areas of the Morales municipality were forcibly displaced to the municipal seat of Morales, seeking refuge in the Vicente Hondarza Educational Institution to safeguard their lives and integrity.

We stand in solidarity with the repeated alerts from the community, civil society reports, early warnings from the Ombudsman's Office, defender hearings, and continuous calls from civil society organisations regarding the desperate situation of the communities in Southern Bolívar. The communities in this region have the right to remain in their territories, to live free from all forms of violence, and to receive protection from the State and the actions of public authorities, local authorities, the prosecutor's office, and judges to ensure that illegal armed organisations do not operate criminally and with complete impunity in this territory. The communities of Southern Bolívar have the right to expect that State agents, particularly members of the security forces, act in accordance with the constitution and laws, and that all parties involved in armed conflicts unconditionally adhere to the norms and principles of international humanitarian law.

As British civil society organisations and international accompanying organisations, we call for effective protection for the communities of Southern Bolívar, structural solutions to ensure the non-repetition of acts of violence, protection for social leadership, and the right to defend rights, and that participation in peace mechanisms does not pose further risks to communities and their leadership.

We extend our deepest condolences to Narciso's family, friends, and communities who have received his years of work. We hope that this crime and the thousands of aggressions perpetrated in Southern Bolívar will be investigated and sanctioned by the judicial system, and that an end will be put to the horror and suffering of the communities living and working under the siege of criminal armed groups

dominating the region. Given the long history of vulnerability of the inhabitants of this region and the decades of neglect by the authorities, their silence and inaction, we call on President Petro's government to direct coordinated and effective action by the State to end the barbarism in this corner of the Magdalena Medio.

Signed by:

- Diakonia (Suecia)
- Programa de Desarrollo y Paz del Magdalena Medio (PDPMM)
- Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD)
- ABColombia
- Manos Unidas
- CIDSE – International Family of Catholic Social Justice Organisations (International)
- Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular/Programa por la Paz (Cinep/PPP)
- Fondo de Fortalecimiento y Protección (FFP)
- Instituto Latinoamericano para una Sociedad y un Derecho Alternativos (ILSA)
- Humanidad Vigente
- Pensamiento y Acción Social (PAS)
- The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
- Fundación Instituto para la Construcción de la Paz (FICONPAZ)
- ODHACO – Oficina Internacional Derechos Humanos – Acción Colombia (Europa)
- Misereor (Alemania)
- Kolko – Derechos Humanos por Colombia e. V. (Alemania)
- Pax Christi International (Europa)
- ACAT (Francia)
- Cooperació (Estado español)
- Sol de Paz Pachakuti (Estado español)
- Colectivo Maloka (Estado español)
- Ask! Arbeitsgruppe Schweiz Kolumbien/Grupo de Trabajo Suiza Colombia (Suiza)
- Fundación Sueca para los Derechos Humanos (Suecia)