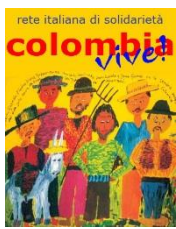
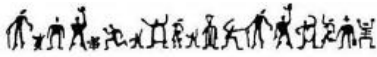


Comité pour le
respect des
Droits Humains
«Daniel Gillard»



Public statement

Brussels, 22 May 2018

The international community must call for the protection of the Living Rivers Movement in the Antioquia department (*Movimiento Ríos Vivos Antioquia*) and an investigation into murders of the Movement's members.

The International Office for Human Rights – Action Colombia (OIDHACO) and the signatory organisations to this letter, would like to express their **serious concerns to the European Union institutions, EU member States, Switzerland and Norway about the situation faced by the population affected by the Hidroitungo development project in Colombia and about the Living Rivers Movement in the Antioquia department (*Movimiento Ríos Vivos Antioquia*), which is comprised of 15 associations of victims of the conflict; people affected by large-scale development projects; women and young people from the region where the project is located.**

According to the Prevention and Protection Plan for the *Movimiento Ríos Vivos Antioquia* (MRVA) which the Movement developed with the support of the Interior Ministry, since 2013 and up until 1 March 2018, **the MRVA suffered 151 security incidents**, including the killings of two of its members. In light of these attacks committed by the state security forces, paramilitary groups and unknown perpetrators during evictions and peaceful protests, the MRVA requested guarantees from the Colombian State. In 2014 some of these collective measures were granted, however, they took more than two years to be partially implemented and are in need of urgent revision. The Colombian State has also granted individual protection measures to nine members of the MRVA



and is studying the cases of five others. Recently, a group of Swiss Parliamentarians sent a letter to several Colombian State institutions¹, urging them to implement the measures contained in the Prevention and Protection Plan.

The population in the Hidroituango project's area of influence has also undergone 10 **forced evictions** over the last few years, which have meant the loss of their ways of life and economic subsistence activities of more than 500 families in the area. These families traditionally work in *barequeo* (small-scale gold extraction) and fishing along the banks of the Cauca River,.

In response to the damages suffered by the population, the company responsible for the project, Empresas Públicas de Medellín (EPM) has offered compensation, however, this is insufficient. The company only aims to compensate part of the activity of *barequeo*² but does not take into account that the population in the area also work as fisherwomen, farmers and casual labourers and that, like *barequeo*, it will no longer be possible to do this work when the area is flooded. In addition, the census carried out by EPM to gather data on the affected population did not take into account all the beach areas where the *barequeo* activity will disappear and did not communicate in a timely way with all the people affected so that they could get to the places where the census was being carried out. That meant that a good number of those people were excluded from the possibility of compensation.

In November 2017, **representatives from the European Union Delegation in Bogotá and the Embassies of France and Spain in Colombia visited the area and learned about the situation first-hand**³. On 20 April 2018, 25 members of the European Parliament sent a letter to the Colombian authorities⁴ expressing concern about this situation because of the possible impacts of the Hidroituango hydroelectric project.

The main impact would be the total lack of access to the bodies of victims of the armed conflict and forced disappearance that might be buried in the area that would be submerged after the flooding of the Hidroituango reservoir. According to the National Commission for Historical Memory, there are 1,029 victims of forced disappearance in the 12 municipalities affected by the Hidroituango project. The Public Prosecutor's Office carried out 159 exhumations of bodies in October 2017, which means that hundreds of other bodies could still be buried in the area. The right to the truth for victims of the armed conflict, relatives of these forcibly disappeared persons, should be protected by the Colombian authorities and international actors who support the peace process in Colombia.

On 28 April and 1 May 2018, a blockage occurred in one of the project's diversion tunnels in the Cauca River, leading to alarmingly low water levels in some places and floods in others⁵ and placing families in the area at risk. Blockages and unblockages have occurred in the last few days causing flooding of the river flow and the consequent eviction of hundreds of people⁶. The geological movements and landslides in the area have caused this situation, and the EPM has not brought it under control⁷. The MRVA has sent alerts about this situation and demanded answers from the EPM and the authorities.

¹ Available at: <https://krf.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Brevet-till-Juan-Manuel-Santos.pdf>.

² Movimiento Ríos Vivos Antioquia, "Delegación de Unión Europea visita zona de influencia de Hidroituango escucha y acompaña a las comunidades afectadas", 8 November 2017, available at: <http://debatehidroituango.blogspot.be/2017/11/delegacion-de-la-union-europea-constata.html>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Available at <https://krf.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Brevet-till-Juan-Manuel-Santos.pdf>.

⁵ In relation to this, see <https://defensaterritorios.wordpress.com/2018/05/02/derrumbe-en-tunel-de-hidroituango/> and <https://twitter.com/RiosVivosCol/status/991483675610173440>.

⁶ El Espectador, "Creciente del río Cauca, sin víctimas mortales, pero con viviendas y puentes destruidos", 13 May 2018, available at: <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/antioquia/creciente-del-rio-cauca-sin-victimas-mortales-pero-con-viviendas-y-puentes-destruidos-articulo-755554>.

⁷ El Colombiano, "Hay movimientos al interior de la montaña que no podemos controlar: EPM", 13 May 2018, available at: <http://m.elcolombiano.com/antioquia/hay-movimientos-al-interior-de-la-montana-que-no-podemos-controlar-epm-FL8692263>.



Added to this situation is the **murder of Hugo Albeiro George Pérez on 2 May 2018**, a member of the El Aro Association of Victims and People Affected by Megaprojects (*Asociación de Víctimas y Afectados por Megaproyectos* - ASVAM) from the municipality of Ituango, an organisation which is part of the *Movimiento Ríos Vivos Antioquia*. The circumstances of his murder are unknown except that he was shot dead in a cafeteria in the municipality of Puerto Valdivia, which **also claimed the life of Domar Egidio Zapata George**⁸.

The harassment against the MRVA has not stopped since then, as **on 8 May 2018, Luis Alberto Torres Montoya was also killed**. Mr Montoya was from the Association of Small Miners and Fishers (*Asociación de Pequeños Mineros y Pesqueros* - AMPA) in Puerto Valdivia, which is part of the MRVA. **Duvian Andrés Correa Sanchez**⁹ **was also killed**.

In the last few days four people have therefore been killed in this area¹⁰ which continues to be affected by problems related to the construction of the Hidroituango project. The local communities need urgent protection from the authorities.

In light of all this, **the signatory organisations to this letter call upon the European Union, its Member States, Switzerland and Norway to take action, by:**

- Urging the Colombian authorities to **protect the MRVA, by promptly implementing their Prevention and Protection Plan, and urgently protecting the communities in the area affected by Hidroituango** from the risks linked to the construction of the dam and the presence of armed actors, placing their security and their lives at risk.
- Asking the Colombian authorities to initiate **a rapid and transparent investigation into the killings of Hugo Albeiro George Pérez, Domar Egidio Zapata George, Luis Alberto Torres Montoya and Duvian Andrés Correa Sanchez** and to prosecute the material and intellectual authors of this crime.
- **Informing European companies that have an economic relationship with the Hidroituango project** about the situation so that they can take appropriate measures.
- Promoting **the right to truth for the victims of the conflict in the area where the Hidroituango project is located so that it can be definitively known whether more bodies are buried in the area and, if this is the case, that the victims' rights are prioritised over the flooding of the area**, in order to comply with the objectives established in the Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP and guarantees of non-repetition.

For further information, contact Miguel Choza Fernández, Oidhaco Coordinator at oidhaco@oidhaco.org, or tel.+32 2 5361913.

⁸ According to Amnesty International, available at:

<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR2383602018ENGLISH.pdf>.

⁹ El Espectador, "Asesinan a otro líder social en Antioquia en menos de ocho días", 8 May 2018, available at:

<https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/medio-ambiente/asesinan-otro-lider-social-en-antioquia-en-menos-de-ocho-dias-articulo-754713>.

¹⁰ Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint program of the Organización Mundial Contra la Tortura (OMCT) and the Federación Internacional de Derechos Humanos (FIDH), "Colombia: Asesinato de dos integrantes del Movimiento Ríos Vivos Antioquia, y dos de sus familiares", 11 May 2018, available at:

<https://www.fidh.org/es/temas/defensores-de-derechos-humanos/colombia-asesinato-de-dos-integrantes-del-movimiento-rios-vivos>.

