



18 December 2008

Re: Colombia – Killing of Mr Edwin Legarda Vazquez, husband of human rights defender, Ms Aída Quilcué

Front Line and Human Rights First strongly condemn the murder of Mr Edwin Legarda Vazquez, husband of human rights defender, Ms Aída Quilcué, Chief Counsel of the *Consejo Regional Indígena de Colombia - CRIC* (The Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca), on 16 December 2008. We ask that you urge the Colombian Government to undertake a prompt, impartial investigation into the murder and to protect Ms Quilcué and her family.

On 16 December 2008, at approximately 4.00 am, members of the Third Division of the National Army opened fire on the car owned by the CRIC on the road between Inza, Tierradentro, and Totorá. We understand that the car was hit approximately 17 times, with three bullets hitting Legarda. He was taken to San José Hospital in Popoyán, the departmental capital, where he received emergency surgery but did not survive the attack.

We note the Army's statement that the car failed to stop at an Army roadblock. However, this announcement is inconsistent with the CRIC's account that no roadblock existed, as well as the fact that the car was hit with 17 bullets from all sides, suggestive of an ambush. If the evidence indicates the commission of a crime, a prompt and impartial investigation, followed by prosecutions are essential.

We are particularly concerned that the killing of Legarda could be related to his wife's activities defending the rights of the indigenous peoples of Colombia and that the intended target may have been Quilcué herself. We understand that most people in the region were aware that the car belonged to the CRIC. Quilcué was an active leader in the recent high profile indigenous protests which began on 11 October 2008 and culminated in a large march and rally in Bogotá on 21 November 2008. Those protests were on occasion broken up forcefully by the National Army and included a high profile debate with President Uribe. Quilcué had just returned from Geneva, Switzerland, where she participated in the Universal Periodic Review of Colombia at the UN Human Rights Council.

We appreciate President Uribe's December 17 statement lamenting the murder and seeking an investigation by the Prosecutor General, Inspector General and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

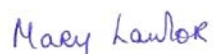
We urge the authorities in Colombia to:

1. Allow the Prosecutor General, Inspector General and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to carry out a joint impartial investigation into the assassination of Legarda. The investigation should culminate in the prosecution of all soldiers and senior officials who were responsible for the death of Legarda. In addition, the investigation should look into whether this act was related to Quilcué's high profile work in support of indigenous rights;

2. Guarantee the protection of Aída Quilcué, her family and all members of the *Consejo Regional Indígena de Colombia - CRIC* and the *Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia –ONIC* (National Indigenous Council of Colombia);
3. Ensure that all human rights defenders in Colombia, carrying out their legitimate work in the defence of human rights, are able to operate free of restrictions and reprisals. In particular government authorities should refrain from public statements which stigmatise the indigenous movement and its leaders and which may embolden attacks against them.

Front Line and Human Rights First respectfully remind you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw attention to Article 12 (1 and 2): “(1) *Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. (2) The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.*”

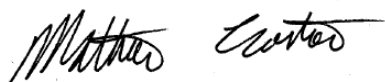
Yours sincerely,



Mary Lawlor

Director

Front Line Defenders



Matt Easton

Director, Human Rights Defenders Program

Human Rights First

