



human rights *first*

30th
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CELEBRATE
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October 24, 2008

Dr. Mario Hernán Iguarán Arana
Fiscal General de la Nación
Diagonal 22-B #52-01
Bogotá, Colombia

cc.

Dr. Carlos Franco
Presidente del Programa de Derechos Humanos
Calle 7 No 6 – 54
Bogotá, Colombia

Edgardo Maya Villazon
Procurador General de la Nación,
Carrera 5 # 15-80,
Bogotá, Colombia

Volmar Antonio Pérez Ortiz
Defensoría del Pueblo
Calle 55 N° 10-32
Bogotá, Colombia

Ambassador Carolina Barco Isakson
Embassy of Colombia
2118 Leroy Pl. NW
Washington DC 20008

Dear Attorney General:

We, the below-signed 1,315 signatories, join Human Rights First in writing to express our concern about the reported recent phone conversation between retired General Rito Alejo Del Río and former Justice and Interior Minister Fernando Londoño Hoyos in which they apparently plan to lodge false criminal complaints against the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission and one of its founders, Father Javier Giraldo.

The Justice and Peace Commission is an internationally renowned human rights organization that peacefully protects and upholds the rights of marginalized communities such as Afro-Colombians and indigenous people. For many years

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Fr. Giraldo and the Justice and Peace Commission have condemned human rights violations allegedly committed by General Del Río as commander of the Army's 17th Brigade in Uraba, Antioquia from 1995 to 1997. As you know Del Río is currently incarcerated, charged with complicity in the paramilitary murder of *campesino* leader Marino López on February 27, 1997. The Justice and Peace Commission represents López in these criminal proceedings.

In the taped conversation Del Río and Hoyo discuss how to discredit the Justice and Peace Commission. Hoyo conjectures that by instructing others to publicly denounce the Commission, "it will allow us to criminally condemn the priest" ("*nos dara pie para denunciar penalmente al cura*"). Del Río responds "yes, of course, of course".

The phone conversation reveals that Del Río and others are attempting to intimidate and discredit activists who seek to expose human rights violations. It also demonstrates the widespread nature of the practice of lodging false criminal complaints against human rights defenders in order to deter them from exposing human rights violations.

We urge you to continue with the criminal investigation and prosecution of Del Río and to act upon information provided by the Justice and Peace Commission as *parte civil* to those proceedings. We reiterate the recommendations contained in Human Rights First's 2007 [report](#) and urge you to adopt systematic measures to prevent abuse of the judicial system, including the specious criminal prosecutions of human rights defenders. These measures should include sending a resolution to all judicial and prosecutorial institutions reemphasizing the Colombian and international law standards that bar politically motivated criminal proceedings. Such a resolution could also instruct prosecutors that you will pay special attention to the problem of false criminal investigations of human rights defenders.

Such measures would protect human rights defenders like Fr. Giraldo and the Justice and Peace Commission and deter people such as General Del Río from attempting to abuse the judicial system.

Thank you for your attention in this urgent matter. We will continue to closely monitor this situation.

Sincerely,

The names of the 1,315 signatories have been hidden for privacy reasons.