

STOP KILLING SOCIAL LEADERS!

COLOMBIA
SOLIDARITY
CAMPAIGN

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The National Indigenous Organisation of Colombia called a National Emergency on 13 August after *Kevin Mestizo* and *Eugenio Tenorio* were assassinated in North Cauca a week after the killing of indigenous guard *Gersain Yatacue*

Stop killing the social leaders in Colombia!!

That was the slogan shouted by the people who protested the on 26th July in central London in a massive campaign around the world and different cities in Colombia, made by the platform *Defendamos la Paz/ We Must Defend Peace*.

But why a protest around the world? Since the signing of the Peace Agreement between the government and the FARC guerrillas in 2016, **more than 700 social leaders and human rights defenders have been killed**. The victims include more than 135 former members of the FARC. The killings have increased since the new government of Ivan Duque took the presidency in August 2018.

Our cry echoes the appeal of thousands of orphans and relatives of the leaders killed. The scream of the Maria del Pilar Hurtado's son shook

the comfort of millions of Colombian people who ignore how important it is to protect the life of the leaders in the rural regions. The pain of that kid watching how his mom was killed in front of him, portrayed how wicked is the system behind the killers and how the policy of death is around us.

We echo of thousands of *campesino*, indigenous and afro-descendant people who have demanded the right to live in their territories, the right to produce their food, to live with their own ideas of development, of how to protect the environment, how to protect life!

The armed conflict has supposedly ended, but Colombia remains a highly dangerous country for anyone who is poor or stands up against the system. The policy of life is to hushed up in a country where the death squads harass us even for looking to peace. The current gov-

ernment continues to trivialize the killings, ignoring the systematic and generalized campaign against social leaders, which is destroying the desire of millions of Colombians to reach peace.

We alert the international community and urge your support for all social movements and human rights defenders.



María del Pilar Hurtado was a community leader assassinated in Tierralta, Córdoba on 21 June 2019. Her eight year old son witnessed her assassination.

Is it worth killing the river? Not the Bruno, not any other



Photo 1: Photo of the institutional and international delegation walking on the new bed of the Arroyo Bruno, diverted by Cerrejón.

Colombia Solidary Campaign has accompanied the struggle of ethnic communities affected by Cerrejón coal mining in La Guajira, north of Colombia, for more than 15 years.

During that time we have seen the expansion of the mine over the land of indigenous Wayuu and afro-descendant communities. They have been displaced from their territory with brutality, or legal tricks and generating distrust and divisions among the communities. The process has resulted in some people being left landless and without any kind of compensation, others being relocated in semi-urban settlements, and all have seen the disruption of their livelihood and faced pollution and water scarcity. In addition, the mine has wrought the breakdown of their cultural, natural, social and economic networks.

The open cast mine, the biggest in Colombia, is owned by giant multinational companies, Anglo American, BHP and Glencore. All three are based in the London Stock Exchange.

The mine is now in a new process of expansion. One of the projects aims to extract coal from underneath the Bruno River. La Guajira is a semi-arid area region with a great environmental fragility given the few sources of water available and to unpredictable extreme weather conditions result of global climate change. Which is greatly due to the burning of coal and fossil fuels to produce electricity in countries with extravagant high levels of energy consumption, such as UK and Europe, where the coal from La Guajira finds its major market at the moment.

The Bruno River is the main tributary to the Rancheria river, the

biggest in the region. and the main source of water for rural ethnic and *campesino* communities and urban centres in all La Guajira. Two communities, NGOs from Bogotá and congress people from Colombia have demanded a stop to the diversion of the river and further exploitation of coal in this area. A sentence from the Supreme Court responded by suggesting wider participation from the communities affected and independent scientists in a working platform established in 2016. But to this date the communities, NGOs and the independent experts have not been able to effectively participate in the platform.

During the delegation in July we visited the river. The company has diverted the lower part of the river and made an artificial river bed and argues that the functionality of the river in the ecosystem is intact.

Nevertheless, what the international delegation witnessed, when joining various institutions from the Colombian government to visit the place, was the new and the diverted bed of the river *is completely dry*. The new bed is too wide in comparison to the original, it also lacks the canopy to protect the water from evaporating given the extreme heat and sunshine in those parts (Photo 1).



Photo 2. Dead tigrillo on the old bed of the River Bruno.

On the old bed of the river, completely dry now, we found a dead *tigrillo* (Photo 2), a kind of ocelot, that gave the desperate impression of solitude and desolation, the feeling of being in a desert with no water. Funnily enough, Cerrejón corporation said that it has been killed by hunters, one wonders why they didn't take the fur. Similar to the *tigrillo*, plenty of huge trees seem to be feeling the consequences of the diversion of the river.

We also visited the higher basin of the river. We found an exuberant tropical dry forest with a great variety of trees, that allow us to see and listen to toucans, kingfisher and plenty of monarch butterflies throughout our walk to the top (Photo 3). The river in this part has not been diverted, and even though it is currently dry season, it is still running. The weather is so dry that even the mine has had to stop night working, since the amount of dust produced

by the operation is exceeding the allowed levels.

Everyone we spoke to uses the river and says that it has never been dried even in the worst summers. They also mentioned how the river used to have a lot of fish, which now is not the case now and it is polluted.

To all this, the response from the company has been a media move pointing at the communities as responsible for stopping the expansion and preventing their production targets. Given the current situation in Colombia and the raise of paramilitary groups threatening community leaders all over the place, it is irresponsible to say the least, that Cerrejón owned by three giant multinationals, blames in their public communications the communities that have been historically affected by this mining mega project.

For more information on this case look at: <https://londonminingnetwork.org>

And to take action asking Colombian institutions to listen to the communities visit this webpage: https://secure.waronwant.org/page/45708/action/1?ea.tracking.id=web&_ga=2.180312301.833870932.1566423890-204955635.1565352603



Photo 3: the higher river basin

Colombians Protest at BBC



The Colombian refugee community in London organised protests in central London on 26th July, including this stoppage outside the BBC demanding coverage of the human rights crisis.

The Colombians have made a banner naming every single one of their *seven hundred* countrymen and women assassinated since the so called Peace Agreement in 2016.

JOIN OUR PROTEST AT BHP AGM

One of the Cerrejón coalmine's owners, UK-listed multinational BHP, holds its AGM at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in Westminster, London, **at 11am on Thursday 17 October.**

We will be working with London Mining Network and War on Want to host visits by indigenous activist Alvaro Ipuana, who lives close to the Cerrejon mine, and Catalina Caro from national NGO CENSAT (Friends of the Earth Colombia). There will be a vigil outside the AGM, probably from 10 till 11am, and Campaign members and the visitors will attend the AGM to pressure BHP to clean up its act. Visitors will also speak at other events in London and the North.

Details will be posted nearer the time on <http://londonminingnetwork.org>

Colombia Solidarity Campaign meets monthly.

For details, email: info@colombiasolidarity.org.uk

<https://www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Colombia-Solidarity-Campaign-168664289837542/>

STOP PRESS

Last night (Thursday 21st August) there was an assassination attempt on Ines Perez, President of the Tabaco Relocation Committee. She was sitting outside her house with several female relatives when a vehicle drove past and three shots were fired. We are waiting for further details.

The attempt comes after repeated death threats against Ines and other known critics of Cerrejón Coal, threats which have been coming from the Aguilas Negras [Black Eagles] until company President Guillermo Foneca issued a public statement to all Cerrejón workers on 16th August warning of reduced production (and implying layoffs) as a result of changes in market conditions and the opposition of named communities and organisations to mine expansion.

Recent threats against Ines and others have come at least in part from people identifying themselves as workers at the mine. We await a statement from our friends at the trade union Sintracarbon, who will undoubtedly condemn this, and there is no suggestion that any unionised workers are connected with these threats. When death threats are made, Cerrejón often denounces them publicly - but it encourages them by the way it blames local communities and social leaders for slowing mine expansion.

Please check Colombia Solidarity Campaign and London Mining Network websites for urgent action suggestions.

www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk

<http://londonminingnetwork.org>