

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We the undersigned human and labor rights organizations call on the Biden Administration to intervene rapidly to address the extreme violence that peaceful protesters in Colombia have faced at the hands of their own government since national protests began on April 28th.

For decades, the Colombian labor movement and many democracy and human rights defenders have suffered threats and violence for exercising their fundamental rights of freedom of expression and association. Unfortunately, the Colombian government, especially the Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron (ESMAD), have consistently been a major actor in perpetrating this violence. Over many years, the national police and ESMAD have used excessive, even deadly, force in dealing with peaceful protests for social justice and against policies that negatively affect most working people in Colombia. The current crisis has brought to the fore again practices that Colombia has long used in response to legal and peaceful protest by workers as well as Afro-descendent and indigenous activists. Since the current protests began, reports from trade unions and civil society organizations in Colombia indicate a militarization of the country through the repressive crackdown on protests by the ESMAD. To date, at least 42 people have been killed by Colombian police and security forces. In addition to the deaths, credible organizations have reported hundreds of wounded individuals and arbitrary detentions, and several cases of sexual assault against women.

We echo the call of 55 members of the U.S. House of Representatives who wrote to the State Department on May 14th calling on the Biden Administration to clearly denounce the excessive use of force against protesters and take specific measures, including the implementation of concrete adjustments in bilateral security cooperation, renewed emphasis on the full implementation the peace process and increased efforts toward authentic dialogue.

Given the close partnership between the United States and Colombia over the last twenty years, including regarding security issues, the United States should issue a clear public statement denouncing the excessive use of force by security forces and demanding accountability for those who have perpetrated violent crimes against protestors. In addition, the Administration should immediately suspend all forms of security assistance not related to human rights training to the national police and set clear time-bound benchmarks for improvements before assistance can resume.

As close allies of the Colombian labor movement, we note that ESMAD has a long history of being deployed by the government to undermine worker rights mobilizations, as documented in the 2016 petition filed by Colombian unions and the AFL-CIO regarding Colombia's failure to comply with the labor standards in the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. Unfortunately, recent measures adopted by the Duque Government, including its 2020 Development Plan, Decree 770 and Decree 1174, weaken labor rights and undermine the Labor Ministry's ability to enforce labor law across the country.

We call on the Biden administration to use all existing policy mechanisms available to address this crisis and bring Colombia into compliance with its international labor and human rights obligations. For example, Colombia's accession to the Organization for Economic

Cooperation and Development (OECD) must be used to align its practices regarding freedoms of association, expression and assembly with those of the OECD. In addition, the Biden administration should impress upon Colombia the importance of accepting the fact-finding mission recently proposed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).

The U.S. human rights and labor movements, stand in solidarity with the National Strike Committee (Comité Nacional del Paro) and the Colombian people from different sectors, communities and regions, especially young people and women, small farmers, indigenous and Afro-descendent communities, as they continue to peacefully mobilize and protest in support of their full demands, including negotiating an agreement with the Colombian social movements on tax reform that motivated the recent protests, and negotiations over the Unified Emergency Proposal of the National Strike Committee. These demands are not the product of the most recent events but reflect widespread discontent with the Duque government's refusal to honor the commitments of the 2016 peace process, rising poverty and inequality, and public health distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Simply de-escalating the violent repression of valid social protest while urgently needed will not resolve the root causes of the 2019 protests and current ones. We urge the Biden administration to offer strong guidance and forms of assistance that focus on immediately restoring constitutional order with full protection of human rights and democracy to the country and supporting good faith negotiations to reach clear and binding commitments on these issues.

Thank you for your time and attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

**ActionAid USA**

**ARISE CHICAGO**

**CASA**

**Casa Latina - Seattle**

**Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR)**

**Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha (CTUL) - Minnesota**

**Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW)**

**Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)**

**Fair World Project**

**Farmworker Association of Florida**

**Food Chain Workers Alliance**

**Georgia Stand-Up**

**Global Health Partners**

**Global Labor Justice-International Labor Rights Forum (GLJ-ILRF)**

**Jobs with Justice**

**Justice Is Global**

**Latin America Working Group (LAWG)**

**National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON)**

**National Employment Law Project (NELP)**

**New Labor**

**Oxfam America**  
**Partnership for Working Families**  
**Rainforest Action Network (RAN)**  
**The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)**  
**Unidad Latina en Accion - Connecticut**  
**Washington Office on Latin America**  
**WeCount! - Florida**  
**Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective**  
**Workers Center of Central New York**  
**Workers Defense Action Fund - Texas**  
**Workers' Dignity/Dignidad Obrera - Nashville**