



Final report of the VII International Caravana of Jurists insists on compliance with the Peace Agreement and guarantees for the defence of human rights in Colombia

This Wednesday on 20th September at 5 pm (London, UK)/ 11 am (Bogotá), the final report of the VII International Caravana of Jurists that visited Colombia in August 2022 will be presented by the **Colombian Caravana**, a London-based organisation which has been working for **15 years** in solidarity with those who work to defend human rights from within the legal community and from civil society at large.¹

The theme of the VII International Caravana of Jurists was judicial independence, with a focus on the judiciary's role in combatting impunity and providing access to justice for victims and human rights lawyers and defenders. The Caravana was composed of 18 jurists and defenders from Canada, France, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. During the Caravana, participating jurists held meetings with human rights organisations, local authorities and justice operators in Bogotá, Bucaramanga, Cali, Cartagena and Cúcuta.

The findings of the VII Caravana will be presented in a hybrid event featuring a panel of international experts on Colombia: Sara Chandler (UK), founder of the Colombian Caravana; Dora Lucy Arias, Colombian Human Rights Lawyer and co-founder of Caravanas; Gonzalo Saenz (Spain) of the International Observatory of Lawyers at Risk (OIAD); Reinaldo Villalba (Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear Restrepo CAJAR); Leonardo Jaimes (Equipo Jurídico Pueblos EJP); Julia Figueroa (Corporación Colectivo de Abogados Luis Carlos Pérez CCALCP); Sofía López (Corporación Justicia y Dignidad) Carlos Ojeda (Fondo de Solidaridad con los Jueces Colombianos FASOL) and Agueda Teja (OIAD).

The Caravana report entitled ***Confronting Impunity: Protection for the Legal Profession and Judicial Independence*** sets out the main findings of this delegation, which took place at a time of institutional change, just weeks after the inauguration of Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez. The report highlights the continuity in the murders of human rights defenders and social leaders, the alarming increase in territorial and gender-based violence, and the acceleration of repression and criminalisation of social protests in 2021. The report also notes the persecution of those advocating for the implementation of the Peace Accord and the challenges that the surviving victims of historical and recent state violence continue to face in their search for justice.

The Caravana also found that the independence of the judiciary is under threat due to a range of factors, including interference by justice and oversight bodies, lack of resources, contempt for and non-implementation and satisfaction of judgements, threats, and killings of justice operators, along with the lack of guarantees and protection. Lawyers, particularly those engaging in human rights work, continue to face threats with serious consequences for their families, the victims they represent, and the human rights community.

¹ The Colombian Caravana is a UK-based human rights organisation that has been organising Caravana delegations since the first one in 2008. The delegations are coordinated together with Colombian lawyers' organisations with which there is a long history of collaboration, such as the Colombian Association of Human Rights Lawyers -Acadefum-, the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective -Cajar-, the Corporación Colectivo de Abogados Luis Carlos Pérez -CCALCP-, the Bar Association of Cartagena, the Corporación Justicia y Dignidad -CJD-, the Corporación Agencia Nacional Étnica, the Equipo Jurídico Pueblos -EJP-, the Equipo Jurídico Humanitario 21 N; and the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes -MOVICE-.

Against this backdrop, the VII Caravana's report formulates a series of recommendations to the Colombian State, starting with the full implementation of the Final Peace Agreement, the dismantling of illegal armed organisations and actors responsible for attacks on the civilian population and on environmental and land defenders, Indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant communities, social leaders, human rights lawyers, and effective protection for these populations, as well as for judges and other justice system operators.

The Caravana also calls on the current government to deepen comprehensive rural reform efforts and resolve the problem of illicit economies with an ethnic and gender focus so as to incorporate the voluntary substitution of illicit crops, the restitution and formalisation of land and the recognition of the right to productive territory of Indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant communities, and to strengthen the presence and capacity of justice entities and State oversight bodies in the territories.

Similarly, the Caravana considers it urgent to strengthen the judicial system to resolve agrarian conflicts and land-related issues and to guarantee access to justice through financial, human, and technical resources so that justice operators have decent working conditions and can carry out their functions.

For the effective protection of victims and defenders, the Caravana calls for adequate funding for the reform of the National Protection Unit (Unidad Nacional de Protección-UNP), free and quality legal assistance for victims of the conflict, the reduction of militarisation and its replacement with new doctrines that prioritise human rights, as well as the separation of the National Police from the Ministry of Defence.

In terms of the right to justice, Caravana points out that it is necessary to guarantee that State security forces refrain from any attack on judicial independence and that, in general, the security and protection of justice operators are strengthened, which requires investigation and punishment of attacks against them. The Caravana also calls on the State to provide financial, human, and technical resources to the units responsible for investigating crimes against human rights defenders and serious human rights violations.

In relation to the functioning of the JEP (Jurisdiction Special for Peace), the VII Caravana recommends increasing resources, ensuring support and harmonious collaboration with other State bodies, and addressing the disparity in the treatment of cases involving military personnel and those involving former FARC combatants.

Regarding oversight bodies, the report recommends the creation of an independent commission to examine the risk of co-optation and corruption in the Attorney General's Office, a reform of the selection system for the Attorney General, and guarantees of impartiality and independence in disciplinary and/or criminal investigations into judicial conduct.

In relation to the protection of lawyers accompanying victims of serious human rights violations, the Caravana recommends recognising and condemning attacks against them, guaranteeing their ability to practice law without fear of unfounded criminal or disciplinary proceedings, stigmatisation, intimidation and harassment, illegal surveillance, theft of sensitive information, arbitrary detention, mental and physical harm, disappearances, or their murder and/or that of their family members.

Finally, the Caravana urges Colombia to consider and implement the recommendations of the Truth Commission Final Report, and those contained in the OHCHR report on Territorial Violence and the Colombia at Risk report, as well as the full implementation of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

For further information:

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See here the [agenda](#) of the event.

Zoom link to participate online.

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82506727781?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82506727781?pwd=eXVHaER4QINoa1BJOU9PMkNJZmV2QT09)

[pwd=eXVHaER4QINoa1BJOU9PMkNJZmV2QT09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82506727781?pwd=eXVHaER4QINoa1BJOU9PMkNJZmV2QT09) Meeting ID: 825 0672 7781/ Access code:
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