

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

Green Party
for the South East of England

Dr Kim Howells
Minister of State
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
King Charles St
London
SW1A 2AH

April 28th 2008

Dear Dr Howells,

Since we corresponded last August about the ongoing risks for human rights workers in Colombia, the situation has escalated even further. A death threat has been issued against several social and human rights organisations by means of an email sent on March 11th from 'black eagle'. It is entitled 'death to leaders of the march for peace and guerilleros and accomplices', a reference to March 6th's march of the Victims of State Crimes Movement. The email specifically names three human rights defenders, Diana Sanchez, Francisco Bustamante and Omar Hernandez and was sent to MINGA, an NGO accompanied by Peace Brigades International (PBI).

The Presidential adviser Jose Obdulio Gaviria made a statement in February 2008 claiming that the march of the Victims of State Crimes Movement was being organised by FARC, a move that PBI suggests may be open to interpretation as a deliberate attempt to provoke harassment and undermine the credibility of the real organisers of the march. Mr Gaviria repeated his claim on a number of occasions and the government failed to set the record straight, making it difficult for the human rights groups behind the march to restore their reputation.

On March 12th another threat was made to 'the communications media, NGOs (sic), embassies, congressmen, ex-congressmen and members of the public who support and logistically collaborate with the narco-guerilla'. It declared all these groups to be military targets and was received, amongst others, by PBI, eight embassies and several Colombian organisations. In the two weeks preceding this threat, 4 community leaders, trade unionists and politicians were assassinated in different parts of Colombia, underlining the ever more severe dangers faced by human rights defenders.

I know that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office keeps the situation in Columbia under close scrutiny and recognises the important role played by human rights workers in the country. Please continue to encourage British embassies to maintain contact with human rights defenders in Columbia by receiving them in the Missions and by visiting them in their places of work. I would also urge you to lobby the Council of Ministers to ensure that similar action is taken by member state embassies in Colombia.

Please continue to ask the Colombian government to guarantee that human rights and other social organisations are permitted to carry out their work safely. Particularly, I would request that the authorities be urged to refrain from making statements such as that issued by Presidential adviser Mr Gaviria and that prompt action is taken to make amends for unfounded accusations already made against legitimately constituted human rights groups. The Colombian government must also be pressed to take effective and immediate action to dismantle the illegal armed groups that have emerged since the demilitarisation of the paramilitary groups there.

Next month, the EU-LAC summit takes place and I trust that the British government will use this opportunity to ensure that the EU opens direct dialogue with the Colombian authorities about the alarming situation of human rights defenders in the country.

Thank you, as always for your attention to these matters and I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline Lucas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.