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Third UA: 012/24 Index: AMR 23/8924/2025 Colombia of January 20, 2025

## COLOMBIA PROTECT DEFENDERS FROM ARMED GROUPS

On November 30, 2024, and again on January 2, 2025, CREDHOS reported a grave threat. The armed group Ejército Gaitanista de Colombia (also known as Clan del Golfo or Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia – AGC) has planned to assassinate CREDHOS President Iván Madero.

For over a year, members of CREDHOS, other civil society organizations like FEDEPESAN, and communities in the Magdalena Medio region have faced threats and stigmatization. These actions are part of the armed group's strategy to expand and strengthen its territorial, political, economic, and social control in the area.

We urge the Colombian government to act now. Protect the civil society organizations and communities of Magdalena Medio.

### Write to Colombia's Minister of Interior urging the government to:

- Exercise the utmost diligence in fulfilling the Ministry of Interior's duty to implement Decrees 2078 of 2017 and 660 of 2018.
- Use prevention and collective protection mechanisms to safeguard human rights defenders.
- Guarantee the safety of organizations like CREDHOS and FEDEPESAN.
- Address ongoing threats against civil society members and communities in the Magdalena Medio region.

### Write to:

Juan Fernando Cristo  
Minister of Interior  
Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Colombia  
Carrera 8 No. 7 - 83  
Bogotá DC, Colombia  
E-mail: [servicioalciudadano@mininterior.gov.co](mailto:servicioalciudadano@mininterior.gov.co)  
X: @CristoBustos

Salutation: *Dear Minister,*

### And copy:

His Excellency Carlos Arturo Morales Lopez  
Ambassador  
Embassy of the Republic of Colombia  
360 Albert Street, Suite 1002  
Ottawa, ON K1R 7X7  
Tel: (613) 230-3760 Fax: (613) 230-4416  
Email: [ecanada@cancilleria.gov.co](mailto:ecanada@cancilleria.gov.co)

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Magdalena Medio is a vast valley in Colombia, bisected by the Magdalena River. It is rich in natural resources, including oil and water, making it a strategic area for economic and political control. The region is home to Colombia's largest refinery, located in Barrancabermeja, Santander, and supports industries such as petroleum, agro-industry, mining, and livestock.

Due to its location and resources, the region has been a battleground for control between the State and armed groups for decades. At least four armed groups operate here, including the Ejército Gaitanista de Colombia (EGC), also known as AGC or Clan del Golfo, Colombia's largest armed group. This ongoing conflict has fueled violence against civilians and human rights defenders.

For decades, Magdalena Medio has been a hub for unions, feminist organizations, popular movements, and human rights defenders. These groups have fostered strong resistance and advocacy despite the violence. However, the region's contested control by armed factions has led to persistent threats and attacks against activists since the 1980s. In 2023 and 2024, violence against civilians, including homicides, has surged.

FEDEPESAN, an organization of fishers working near Barrancabermeja, has exposed water pollution and criminal activities like drug and human trafficking. Its president, Yuly Velázquez, has faced severe violence, including death threats, firearm attacks, and intimidation during protests.

Despite the high risks, the National Protection Unit (UNP) has provided inadequate protection for Velázquez. Amnesty International has documented these deficiencies and called for urgent action multiple times, highlighting the need for stronger measures to ensure her safety and that of FEDEPESAN members.

CREDHOS, based in Barrancabermeja and founded in 1987, has long faced threats from armed groups. In 2000, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) issued precautionary measures to protect CREDHOS. The Colombian government recognized the organization in 2016 as a victim of collective human rights violations.

CREDHOS has recently reported significant police and prosecutor actions against the EGC, including arrests of former military personnel involved with the group. However, its members remain under severe threat. Amnesty International has issued multiple urgent actions, including in 2021 and 2024, calling for comprehensive state protection for CREDHOS. Despite these efforts, the organization continues to face collective threats due to the presence of armed groups in the region.

The ongoing violence in Magdalena Medio highlights the urgent need for stronger state protection for human rights defenders and communities. Organizations like FEDEPESAN and CREDHOS play a vital role in advocating for justice and exposing abuses but face relentless threats in their efforts to bring about change.

***Please take action as soon as possible until April 9, 2025! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.***