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First UA: 005/25 Index: AMR 23/8941/2025 Colombia of January 21, 2025

COLOMBIA PROTECT CIVILIANS IN CATATUMBO

Since January 16, armed violence has intensified in the Catatumbo region of northeast Colombia. This violence stems from clashes between the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the General Staff of Blocks and Fronts (EMBF), a dissident faction of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army (FARC-EP). Reports indicate dozens of civilian deaths, the forced displacement of thousands, and growing threats of confinement, further killings, and enforced disappearances.

We urge Colombian authorities to take immediate and effective action to protect all civilians in Catatumbo, including human rights defenders.

Write to the President of Colombia urging him to:

- Exercise the utmost diligence in adopting preventive measures and collective protection mechanisms to safeguard civilians.
- Guarantee the safety of human rights defenders, social leaders, and their communities.
- Ensure comprehensive protection for vulnerable populations in the region.

Write to:

Gustavo Petro Urrego
Presidente de la República
Carrera 8 No. 7-26, Bogotá
Email: contacto@presidencia.gov.co
X: @petrogustavo
Salutation: Dear President,

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

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Catatumbo region is in northeast Colombia, within the Norte de Santander department. It spans the area between the Eastern Andes and Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela. This resource-rich region, especially in oil, faces extreme poverty, violence, and militarization. Basic needs like health, food,

education, water, and housing are unmet for many residents. The lack of infrastructure isolates the region, making it one of Colombia's main centers for coca leaf cultivation and production.

Amnesty International has monitored violence against human rights defenders in Catatumbo for years. Their focus includes the Catatumbo Social Integration Committee (CISCA). Since 2020, two major risks have hindered CISCA's work: [high violence levels, especially against social leaders, and forced eradication of coca crops](#). Poverty and limited access to essential services further exacerbate tensions. By mid-2023, forced eradication of coca crops had ended, and military activity had decreased. However, armed group actions persisted, preventing a safe environment for human rights work and social mobilization.

Armed confrontations resumed on January 16, 2025, between the National Liberation Army (ELN) and dissident factions of the former FARC-EP, known as the EMBF. Reports highlight civilian deaths, including social leaders and demobilized FARC-EP members. Warnings of [further killings, forced displacements, and disappearances](#) followed. The Ombudsperson's Office reported at least 60 killings and massive displacement affecting over 11,000 people, including Indigenous and peasant communities. Families fled to Ocaña, Tibú, Cúcuta, and Venezuela's Zulia region. Despite government claims of prioritizing civilian protection and evacuation efforts, significant risks remain, demanding urgent action.

Please take action as soon as possible until February 3, 2025! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.