



**Urgent Action Office** 3-1992 Yonge Street Toronto ON M4S 1Z7 Phone: (416) 363-9933 Fax: (416) 363-3103 [urgentaction@amnesty.ca](mailto:urgentaction@amnesty.ca)  
Third UA: 16/25 Index: AMR 23/0260/2025 Colombia of September 11, 2025

## **COLOMBIA**

### **STOP HARASSMENT OF THE FISHING COMMUNITY**

Between June and August, 26 fisher families from San Silvestre, Barrancabermeja, were forced to leave their homes after receiving threats to their safety.

On July 5 and again on August 11, Yuly Velásquez, president of FEDEPESAN, received death threats by phone. In another incident on August 4, FEDEPESAN member Janeth Millán was evicted from her home and assaulted by police, despite ongoing legal actions meant to protect her.

Later, on August 27, Barrancabermeja's Secretary of Environment ordered the demolition of FEDEPESAN's modest meeting space near Ciénaga de San Silvestre.

Therefore, we urge the Mayor's Office to protect FEDEPESAN and its members. The harassment and violence against the fishing community must end.

#### **Write to the Mayor of the District of Barrancabermeja urging him to:**

- Guarantee protection and support for FEDEPESAN and its members.
- Prevent all forms of harassment against FEDEPESAN and its members.

#### **Write to:**

Jonathan Vásquez Gómez  
Mayor of the District of Barrancabermeja  
Carrera 5 # 50-43,  
Barrancabermeja, Santander, Colombia  
E-mail: [contactenos@barrancabermeja.gov.co](mailto:contactenos@barrancabermeja.gov.co)  
X: @alcaldiabarranc  
*Salutation: Dear Mayor,*

#### **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) 695-0152 Fax: (613) 230-4416  
Email: [ecanada@cancilleria.gov.co](mailto:ecanada@cancilleria.gov.co)

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Magdalena Medio is a vast valley between Colombia's mountain ranges, crossed by the Magdalena River. Petroleum is the main industry, with the country's largest refinery in Barrancabermeja. The area is also home to farming, mining, and livestock. Because of its resources, the region has long been contested by the State and armed groups. At the same time, it has been a centre for civic activism. Unions, feminist groups, grassroots movements, and human rights defenders have built strong networks here since the 1980s. However, violence has been constant, with armed groups such as the Ejército Gaitanista de Colombia (EGC/AGC or Clan del Golfo) committing killings and forced displacements.

The Federation of Artisanal, Environmentalist, and Tourist Fishers of Santander (FEDEPESAN) operates in Ciénaga de San Silvestre near Barrancabermeja. The group promotes sustainable fishing and monitors water quality and biodiversity, including endangered species like the Antillean manatee. With human rights group CREDHOS, FEDEPESAN won a July 2025 court ruling confirming that pollution in the area violated the right to a healthy environment. They have also exposed corporate pollution, corruption by environmental authorities, and the presence of armed groups seeking to control local waterways.

FEDEPESAN president Yuly Velásquez has faced repeated threats and attacks, including shots fired at her home, intimidation during protests, and armed assaults on her protection team. [Amnesty International has documented these risks](#) and issued multiple Urgent Actions since 2022, urging stronger protection for FEDEPESAN. In recognition of its work, the group received [Amnesty International Germany's 2024 Human Rights Award](#) for defending water, the environment, and artisanal fishers. Colombian authorities have acknowledged risks to fisher communities through early [warning alerts](#) and follow-up meetings, yet threats and pressure continue.

[On February 15](#), 2025, FEDEPESAN leaders announced they felt forced to abandon their territory. Soon after, 26 fisher families from several communities were [displaced to Bucaramanga](#). Following dialogue with authorities, they agreed to return in August if safety was guaranteed. During this time, FEDEPESAN member Janeth Millán was evicted from her home of 18 years. A recognised victim of the armed conflict, she belongs to an Indigenous community, lives in poverty, and cares for two daughters. Despite legal actions, she was forcibly removed, her belongings dumped outside, and she reported being assaulted by police during the eviction.

Shortly after the families' return, on August 27, Barrancabermeja's Secretary of Environment ordered the demolition of a modest FEDEPESAN meeting place by the Ciénaga. Authorities claimed it was an environmental offence, though the site was a small wooden structure between a road and the lake, in an area where larger private venues already operate. No alternative meeting space has been offered, further disrupting FEDEPESAN's fishing and environmental monitoring activities.

***Please take action as soon as possible until December 10, 2025. The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.***