

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 27, 2020

His Excellency Mr. Iván Duque Márquez  
President  
Republic of Colombia

Dear President Duque,

As longtime friends of Colombia, we write to express our deep concern about the recent murder of five Afro-Colombian teenagers in Cali and a series of other mass killings, and to urge your government to carry out a thorough investigation to ensure justice for the victims and their families.

On August 11<sup>th</sup>, the bodies of Josmar Jean Paul Cruz Perlaza (aged 15), Leider Cárdenas Hurtado (15), Luis Fernando Montaña (15), Álvaro José Caicedo Silva (14), and Jair Andrés Cortez Castro (14) were found in the Llano Verde neighborhood in eastern Cali, Colombia. Media reports suggest they had left their homes that morning to fly kites and never returned. Their bodies showed clear signs of torture.

The community of Llano Verde is comprised largely of families who were displaced by Colombia's decades-long civil conflict. Two days after the murder, on August 13<sup>th</sup>, a grenade was thrown into the Llano Verde police station, killing one and injuring 15. It is unclear whether there is a connection between the two incidents, but they underscore the persistent dangers the residents of Llano Verde face.

Just days later, on August 18<sup>th</sup>, eight young people were murdered by armed men at a birthday barbecue in Samaniego, in the southern department of Nariño. And on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, there were three additional mass murders in the span of 24 hours, leaving 17 people killed in the provinces of Cauca and Nariño.

These and other recent murders highlight the consequences of the continued lack of adequate state presence in many parts of Colombia. The Cali murder in particular reinforces the need for greater investment in Afro-Colombian communities and serves as a reminder of the disproportionate impact of the country's continued civil conflict on historically marginalized populations. While we recognize Colombia's progress over the last two decades in reducing crime rates, strengthening its democratic institutions, and providing reparations to victims of human rights abuses, that progress has been unequal. In order to build on this progress in a more equitable and sustainable way, it is critical that Colombia fully implements the 2016 peace accord and works proactively to protect social leaders, activists, and human rights defenders. More than 400 of these community leaders have been killed since the signing of the accords.

It is essential that the Colombian government carry out an exhaustive investigation to bring the perpetrators of these and the other recent massacres to justice. We also urge the Unit for Comprehensive Assistance and Reparation to Victims to support the victims' families.

Colombia is a vital ally and partner of the United States. As members of Congress who have long championed robust U.S.-Colombia relations, we urge your Administration to honor the memory of these victims by redoubling efforts to invest in and support Afro-Colombian communities and other historically marginalized and under-resourced communities throughout the country. We remain committed to working with your government to further strengthen Colombia's democratic institutions and achieve a lasting and inclusive peace for all Colombians.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



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Albio Sirs  
Chairman  
Western Hemisphere Subcommittee



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Gregory W. Meeks  
Vice Chair  
Western Hemisphere Subcommittee



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Eliot L. Engel  
Chairman  
House Foreign Affairs Committee