

ISHR launches report on human rights defenders in Colombia

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The report portrays a Colombian Government showing a more constructive attitude in its dealings with human rights defenders. While acknowledging these efforts, it also identifies a failure to mainstream this attitude among local authorities, a worrying increase in attacks on human rights defenders in the past year, and the limited success of State authorities in investigating and addressing the incessant attacks on human rights defenders.

The report is the result of research into the status of implementation of [recommendations made by the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders](#), Ms Margaret Sekaggya, following her visit to Colombia in 2009.

Entitled [Human Rights Defenders in Colombia: How is the Government protecting their rights?](#), it summarises the main views of human rights defenders, representatives of the Colombian State, and the local United Nations human rights office.

An event to mark the launch of the report was held at Rosario University in Bogotá, Colombia. The findings were officially presented by ISHR Board member, Mr Gustavo Gallón. Presentations were also made by representatives of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia, and the Government of Colombia.

The report's findings include observations of a clear change in the Government's attitude towards human rights defenders since August 2010 during the administration of President Santos, including greater openness and willingness to dialogue and a proposal to formulate a State policy on human rights. Public officials have been instructed to more positively engage with human rights defenders and with civil society organisations, including by respecting their opinions and activities, even when they criticise Government or State action.

However, the research highlights a lack of understanding and agreement amongst authorities at the regional and local levels about these new government policies. Information from non-governmental organisations indicates that individual attacks against human rights defenders during the first half of 2011 increased by 126 percent over the same period in 2010.

It further reveals that there has been little progress in the area of investigations into attacks on human rights defenders and illegal wiretapping of their communications. Arbitrary detention of defenders and break-ins and theft of their research materials are said to continue. Also, defenders express concern that, despite efforts to reform the government protection programme for human rights defenders, the programme is still not providing timely and effective protection for threatened defenders, including women defenders, leaders of land restitution processes, and indigenous leaders.

You can download a copy of ISHR's report, *Human Rights Defenders in Colombia: How is the Government protecting their rights?*, in [English](#) or [Spanish](#).

In addition to the report's launch in Colombia, an ISHR side event will be held at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland on 6 March (13h00 – 15h00 local time). The side event will address the theme of human rights defenders in the Americas, and the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders will be present to speak about ISHR's report on Colombia.