

Human Rights Council. 28th Session

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Mr. President,

Somos Defensores recorded 626 aggressions against human rights defenders in Colombia, and *Udefegua* 799 attacks in Guatemala in 2014. Defending rights in these countries remains extremely dangerous, as shown by the new OHCHR reports.

We agree with the analysis that human rights defenders are crucial to the Colombian peace process and urge the government to protect them from the additional risks their participation has implied. However, the role of defenders in the hopefully soon post-conflict Colombia will be equally crucial and could imply continued and new risks, including stemming from the expansion of natural resource exploitation. The Office's local support for defenders will continue to be vital.

We commend both reports' calls to end impunity and hope that the Office's intention to monitor criminal investigations into attacks against defenders in Colombia is replicated in Guatemala.

OHCHR identified Guatemalan defenders working on economic, social, cultural, environmental, land and indigenous rights, as particularly vulnerable. We urge Guatemala to review the laws and punish the authorities which together criminalise defenders. We encourage strong statements of recognition of these defenders to counteract the smear campaigns referred to in the report.

Mr President, ISHR visited Colombia and Guatemala this year to consult 75 defenders from 21 Latin American countries. They outlined trends, reflected in the reports, which require urgent attention throughout the continent. ISHR recommends, therefore, that States take the following steps.

- First: ensure that defenders working on business and human rights are recognised and consulted, rather than exposed to magnified risks from State and non-State actors.
- Second: guarantee that security strategies do not threaten defenders and that States accept human rights demands as positive contributions to combatting violence and crime.
- Third: tackle the additional risks faced by women and LGBTI defenders.
- Fourth: end the stigmatisation of human rights defence.

And finally: to strengthen and implement protection policies. Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico have all begun legislative initiatives to protect defenders. Their priority should be to finish them and to make them work.

Thankyou