



OBSERVATORIO  
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DE LA ABOGACÍA

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**Dr. Gustavo Francisco Petro Urrego**

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**Paris, 28 October 2022**

Respected Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Sirs and Mesdames:

The International Observatory of Lawyers at Risk (OIAD by its French acronym), together with the undersigned entities, respectfully address you, in your role as the most prominent human rights defence institution in Colombia, to express our concern about information received regarding the situation of Luz Estella Romero Villalba and the rest of the members of the Asociación Colectivo Mujeres al Derecho (ASOCOLEMAD or Collective Association of Women in Law), composed of lawyers and human rights defenders in their country.

Based in Barranquilla, ASOCOLEMAD focuses its work on the promotion, enforceability and defence of the human rights of women, girls, youth and marginalized communities, as well as on issues related to the environment and the territory. In judicial matters, ASOCOLEMAD carries out strategic litigation supporting organizations and groups of women who have been victims of the armed conflict.

According to the information received, the members of ASOCOLEMAD have been victims of surveillance, harassment and persecution since 2014 due to their professional work in defence of human rights. The Observatory, after identifying and reviewing the risk situation, published an alert on May 4, 2022, condemning the serious attacks suffered by the legal representative of ASOCOLEMAD, Luz Estella Romero Villalba. The aforementioned alert emphasized the Observatory's concern regarding the serious incident suffered by the son of Luz Romero Villalba, who on 26 December 2019, was the victim of an attempted kidnapping and forced disappearance, with physical and psychological torture. The criminal complaint directed against the allegedly responsible members of the Barranquilla Metropolitan Police was filed on February 19, 2020. It has since been extremely difficult for ASOCOLEMAD to access the information in the file, without prejudice to the claims seeking access to information filed with the National Office of the Attorney General. **After**



**over two years without information on the progress of the investigations, Luz Estella Romero Villalba was notified on September 30, 2022, of an order from the Attorney General's Office to close the attached complaint.**

The undersigned organizations express their concern about the actions of the National Office of the Attorney General in relation to the investigation of the serious facts denounced in the complaint. In particular, the lack of grounds and the number of inconsistencies in the Attorney General's order are of concern, including the reference to facts that are unrelated to the subject matter of the complaint.

**At the present time, despite having reported each risk incident, ASOCOLEMAD continues to suffer persistent risk episodes due to the activities its members undertake. In particular, the high-risk situation that affects the lawyer Luz Estella Romero Villalba and her son has led to their forced displacement and the interruption of her professional career.**

The undersigned organizations convey their concerns about the high risks assumed by ASOCOLEMAD members derived from the exercise of their profession. The acts of harassment reported by its members indicate a staggered sequence of incidents, generating a violation of their physical, emotional and psychological integrity.

For the aforementioned reasons, the OIAD and the undersigned entities would like to urge you, as institutions and authorities for the defence of human rights, to:

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the safety and physical and psychological integrity of those who make up ASOCOLEMAD, within the framework of protection programs and international standards;
2. Guarantee, under all circumstances, that human rights defence lawyers in Colombia can carry out their activities in defence of human rights without fear of reprisals and without restrictions and with respect for the United Nations Basic Principles of the Role of Lawyers, signed in Havana in 1990.

Likewise, in particular, we urge the Office of the Attorney General to observe due diligence and guarantee the rights to due process, defence, access to justice and the right to information in the investigation of the reported facts.

We thank you for your willingness to respond to our request. We remain attentive to any information you can provide regarding the aforementioned case, as well as any potential developments that may occur in relation to it.

**Jérôme Gavaudan**

President of the International Observatory for Lawyers in Danger (OIAD)



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The following organisations join this statement:



**Colombian Caravana of Jurists**



**Global Justice Association**



**Lawyers Rights Watch Canada**



**Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)**