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Colombia: Several members of Congreso de los Pueblos and CISBCSC detained

During coordinated actions between 21 and 22 March 2017, the police and the National Army raided homes and arrested several social leaders and human rights defenders from different municipalities in southern Bolívar, Colombia. Those detained include **Milena Quiroz Jiménez, Isidro Alarcón Bohorquez, Francisco Zabaleta** and the daughter of **Joaquin Gomez**. The police also attempted to detain **Arisolina Rodríguez** while she was at an event, but were prevented from doing so by other participants at the event.

Milena Quiroz Jiménez has been a social leader for over 15 years. She is the spokeswoman for the **Comisión de Interlocución del Sur de Bolívar, Centro y Sur del Cesar (Southern Bolivar Inter-Dialogue Commission, Center and South of Cesar - CISBCSC)**, and a legal representative of **Cooperativa Multiactiva de Arenal – COMUARENAL** and **Consejo de Comunidades Negras Casimira Olave Arincon Amela (Council of Black Communities Casimira Olave Arincon Amela)**. She is a leader of the **Congreso de los Pueblos (Peoples' Congress)** and the **Cumbre Agraria Etnica y Popular (Popular and Ethnic Agrarian Summit)**, where she heads productive projects carried out by the Cumbre Agraria with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Arisolina Rodríguez, Isidro Alarcón Bohorquez and Joaquin Gomez are local leaders in MicoHumado. Francisco Zabaleta is the legal representative of the Association of Miners of Casa de Barro. These movements constitute the *Comisión de Interlocución del Sur de Bolívar, Centro y Sur del Cesar*-CISBCSC and *Congreso de los Pueblos*.

[Congreso de los Pueblos](#) is a social movement that brings together different sectors and social actors. Since its launch in 2010, it has had a prominent role in the social mobilisations carried out in Colombia, especially in the agricultural strikes of 2013, 2014 and 2016. CISBCSC is a social movement that has gained support in the southern region of Bolívar and Central and South Cesar in Colombia in the past 12 years. It coordinates dialogues between communities within South Bolívar, the centre and south of Cesar, the Esperanza Norte de Santander and Puerto Wilches Santander and the national government.

During a series of coordinated events between 21 and 22 March 2017, the Police and the National Army raided residences and arrested several social leaders and human rights defenders from the southern Bolívar region. Milena Quiroz and Isidro Alarcon were detained in their respective homes in the municipality of Arenal, while Francisco Zabaleta was detained at his home in the municipality of Norosí. In a separate operation, after failing to locate Joaquin Gomez, authorities arrested his daughter. Joaquin Gomez was threatened by paramilitary forces only a few days earlier. The human rights defenders were not notified of the charges or shown a warrant order at the time of their detention, except for Milena Quiroz, who was presented with a warrant for her arrest by the police, on charges of “conspiracy to commit a crime”.

Arisolina Rodríguez had travelled from Micohumado to Barrancabermeja to attend an event on the Participation of Civil Society in the Implementation of the Peace Process, convened by organisations of Barrancabermeja. Public officers arrived at the event to arrest the human rights defender, but other

participants prevented the police from taking her.

The arrest of these social leaders takes place in the context of the militarisation of the urban centre of Micohumado, the paramilitarization of the region and increased threats against the leaders of the region. According to sources, they were arrested for allegedly being linked to *guerrilla* groups.

The Colombian State has previously accused social leaders of being linked to *guerrilla* groups without concrete evidence. Local movements consider that this new crackdown is aiming to sabotage the participation of the social sectors in the negotiations with the National Liberation Army (known as the ELN), which formally started in Quito, Ecuador, last February.

Front Line Defenders expresses its concern at the detention of human rights defenders Milena Quiroz Jiménez, Isidro Alarcón Bohorquez and Francisco Zabaleta, as well as the daughter of Joaquin Gomez and the attempted detention of Arisolina Rodríguez, which it believes to be in relation to their human rights work and leading roles in their communities. Front Line Defenders expresses further concern at the ongoing stigmatisation of social leaders in Colombia, particularly human rights defenders working on areas that have been historically affected by the presence of illegal armed groups.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Colombia to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Milena Quiroz Jiménez, Isidro Alarcón Bohorquez and Francisco Zabaleta, as well as the daughter of Joaquin Gomez;
2. Take all the necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of all detained human rights defenders, as well as their family members;
3. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the alleged charges brought against all the detained human rights defenders;
4. Cease targeting human rights defenders in Colombia and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.