

Colombia: Six human rights defenders killed during the first week of 2019

Six human rights defenders, **Jesús Adier Perafán**, **Gilberto Valencia**, **Wilmer Antonio Miranda**, **José Rafael Solano**, **Wilson Pérez Ascanio**, and **Maritza Quiroz Leiva**, were killed in violent attacks in Colombia during the first week of 2019.

Maritza Quiroz Leiva was a woman human rights defender, deputy of the Victims Committee of Santa Marta (*Mesa de Víctimas of Santa Marta*) and the leader of a group of Afro-Colombian women who have been victims of enforced displacement in rural areas. She advocated for the rights of all victims of the Colombian conflict, especially regarding situations of enforced displacement, which she suffered herself, and of the Afro-community that she was a part of.

At 3am on 7 January 2019, Maritza Quiroz Leiva was killed by unidentified armed men who broke into her rural property in San Isidro, in Sierra Nevada, Santa Marta. Before the armed men entered her house, Maritza Quiroz Leiva asked her son Luis Camilo Bermúdez Quiroz to hide under the bed, from where he heard the shots. He ran to a police station as soon as the killers left.

Wilson Pérez Ascanio was a human rights defender, social leader, and member of the Movement for the Popular Constituent (*Movimiento por la Constituyente Popular*, MCP). On 5 January 2019, he was shot by unidentified armed men on a motorcycle in Hacarí, Norte de Santander. He was transferred to a nearby hospital in La Playa de Belén, but died in the early hours of 6 January 2019.

José Rafael Solano was a human rights defender, president of the Community Action Board (*Junta de Acción Comunal*) and social leader. At 5pm on 4 January 2019, unidentified armed men shot him dead in front of his house, between the municipalities of Zaragoza and Caucasia, in Bajo Cauca, Antioquia. His family witnessed the crime.

Wilmer Antonio Miranda was a human rights defender and member of the Cajibío Peasant Workers Association (*Asociación de Trabajadores Campesinos de Cajibío*), of the National Association of Peasant Reserves (*Asociación Nacional de Zonas de Reserva Campesina*), the National Coordination of Coca, Amapola and Marijuana Cultivators (*Coordinadora Nacional de Cultivadores de Coca, Amapola y Marihuana*), and the Social and Political Coordination Patriotic March in the Cauca region. At 6pm on 4 January 2019, he was shot by four unidentified men, dressed as civilians, and died immediately.

Jesús Adier Perafán was a social leader and citizen inspector of the Caicedonia municipality, as well as the founder of the Courage Caicedonia (*Coraje Caicedonia*) political organisation and president of the Community Action Board (*Junta de Acción Comunal*) of the Valle del Cauca neighbourhood. On 1 January 2019, he was shot at repeatedly while he was at the grocery store by unidentified armed men, who subsequently escaped on motorcycles. Jesús Adier Perafán was taken to the Santander de Caicedonia Hospital, where he died of his gunshot wounds. The investigations are facing difficulties due to the lack of witnesses to the attack.

Gilberto Valencia was a human rights defender, social leader, peace-builder and cultural manager of the Suárez municipality in Cauca, who worked to disseminate the terms of the Colombian Peace Agreement through music. He was also the leader of the “Los Herderos” group, and won an award in 2015 for his social entrepreneurship. He was shot dead during a New Year’s Eve celebration with his family and friends in the municipality of Suárez, Cauca. A lone gunman, believed to have

been known to Gilberto Valencia in the context of his social work, is understood to have carried out the attack with an altered firearm.

Colombia has seen an increase in violence against human rights defenders since the signing of the Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP. Two years on, the State has failed to implement most of its obligations, including establishing an integrated presence in rural regions. This has led to a number of illegal armed groups fighting for control of the areas previously occupied by FARC-EP, which puts human rights defenders at an increased risk.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the wave of killings of human rights defenders in Colombia, which witnessed **more killings of defenders** than any other country worldwide in 2018. The epidemic has already reached extremely worrying heights during the first week of 2019. Front Line Defenders draws attention to the pattern of assassinations against defenders in the country, which often includes armed attacks by unidentified individuals.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Colombia to:

1. Strongly condemn the killings of Jesús Adier Perafán, Gilberto Valencia, Wilmer Antonio Miranda, José Rafael Solano, Wilson Pérez Ascanio, and Maritza Quiroz Leiva;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killings of Jesús Adier Perafán, Gilberto Valencia, Wilmer Antonio Miranda, José Rafael Solano, Wilson Pérez Ascanio, and Maritza Quiroz Leiva, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of the family members of Jesús Adier Perafán, Gilberto Valencia, Wilmer Antonio Miranda, José Rafael Solano, Wilson Pérez Ascanio, and Maritza Quiroz Leiva;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Colombia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.