

4 May 2018

## **Colombia: Killing of a human rights defender is the latest attack on Movimiento Ríos Vivos Antioquia**

On 2 May 2018, human rights defender **Hugo Albeiro George Pérez** was shot and killed by an unknown individual, while he was participating in a peaceful protest to oppose the impact of Hidroituango Hydroelectric Project in Colombia's Antioquia Department. The human rights defender's nephew, Domar Egidio Zapata George, was also killed in the attack.

Hugo Albeiro George Pérez was a member of the **Victims of Megaprojects ASVAM El Aro Association** (Asociación de Víctimas y Afectados por Megaproyectos ASVAM El Aro) in the Ituango Municipality, which is part of Movimiento Ríos Vivos Antioquia (MRVA). [MRVA](#) is a human rights movement made up of 15 associations affected by extractive industries in Colombia, the organisation monitors environmental and human rights violations related to the construction of hydroelectric projects. MRVA has been denouncing the negative impact of the Hidroituango Hydroelectric Project, which is under construction on the Cauca River near Ituango in the Antioquia Department.

MRVA says that the Hidroituango Hydroelectric Project has conducted illegal logging and hazardous waste disposal without considering the impact on the environment and on local communities. The Cauca River is of great importance to the culture and economy of the local communities, who now face daily risks of floods and landslides that threaten their homes and livelihoods. The communities have also been among the most affected by the wider Colombian conflict; some have been victims and witnesses of disappearances, massacres, tortures, and killings by armed groups. The project threatens to flood mass graves, where unidentified bodies were buried throughout the conflict. This could undermine the future investigations of armed conflict violence as part of the Transitional Justice System in Colombia.

The protest on 2 May 2018, had specifically been arranged by communities of Puerto Valdivia, who were particularly worried about the construction of the dam wall, which they believed could result in destruction of local land and property.

The Hidroituango Hydroelectric Project, which is being carried out by Public Enterprises of Medellín (Empresa Públicas de Medellín – EPM), affects more than 26 hectares of land in 19 municipalities. The EPM has reportedly not offered any form of compensation to those affected by the project, and human rights defenders complain it continues to violate its obligations under the environmental licence granted by the state.

In the context of the opposition to the impact of the Hidroituango Hydroelectric Project, there have been 152 attacks against members of MRVA including Hugo Albeiro George Pérez. Three people have been killed, two have survived attempts on their lives, and sixty-three people have been threatened and harassed by paramilitary forces. Two attacks have involved explosives and two have involved torture. There have been seventeen smear campaigns against MRVA members, ten cases of discrimination because of links with MRVA activities, one attempted enforced disappearance, and two cases of harassment.

There is no one group responsible for the attacks against the members of MRVA, but the private security company hired by EPM and illegal armed groups represent a biggest threat for those involved with MRVA. MRVA has a collective Prevention and Protection Plan in place, with the help of the Ministry of Interior, which agreed to adopt political and material measures to help the security of the communities in Antioquia. However, these measures have never been implemented.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the killing of human rights defender Hugo Albeiro George Pérez, as it believed that his assassination was linked with his work in MRVA. Front Line Defenders expresses further concern for the risks and threats the members of MRVA face everyday, because of their work in the defence of the environmental and land rights of the communities in Puerto Valdivia, Antioquia, who opposed the Hidroituango project.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Colombia to:**

1. Strongly condemn the killing of human rights defender Hugo Albeiro George Pérez;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the assassination Hugo Albeiro George Pérez and the multiple attacks on MRVA members, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Implement the political and material measures agreed in the collective Prevention and Protection Plan of MRVA;
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.