



## Human rights defenders

5

### Implementation of recommendations from the previous period

Norway, Uruguay, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Australia recommended investigating attacks committed against social leaders. However, these investigations have not seen advances. Since its creation in 2016, the Attorney General Office's Special Investigation Unit (UEI), which is responsible for dismantling the criminal organizations responsible for attacks against defenders, has only investigated 392 cases (126 during the evaluation period), with just 15% ending in a conviction. (1)

Meanwhile, Belgium, Germany, Ghana, Costa Rica, and the Netherlands recommended strengthening existing protection mechanisms. However, the number of murders of defenders increased between 1 January 2018 and 30 June 2023, with a total of 1,292 cases reported. (2)

This is the result of not prioritizing community and organization-based security measures as part of the protection approach, as well as a drop in the number of cases approved for State protection measures by the National Protection Unit (UNP). (3)

### Current Status

Violence and the lack of guarantees for the defense of human rights in Colombia continue. According to the Somos Defensores Program, between January 2018 and March 2023 (4) there were 4,685 attacks against defenders. This means that every month there was an average of 74.36 acts of aggression against this population.

Given the gravity of this situation, in September 2022 the national government announced an Emergency Plan to protect human rights defenders. This proposal was designed by human rights coalitions and congressional representatives. (5) As of May 2023, more than 700 commitments have been issued for institutions and territorial entities in the framework of the Unified Command Posts for Life, (6) achieving a 27.2% compliance rate, according to Early Alert 019 of 2023 of the Ombuds Office.

The current administration has been delayed with convening the National Guarantees Roundtable. (7) Even though this commitment was included in the Emergency Plan, the first meeting of the Roundtable was announced a year later. In addition, there is still no evidence of organizational and community capacity development that would guarantee protection for human rights defenders. A significant challenge involves energizing, accompanying, and allocating resources to implement the Comprehensive Security and Protection Program for communities and organizations in the territories, in accordance with Decree 660 of 2018.

(1) Response to Information Request No. 20225760007621 from the Attorney General's Office.

(2) Data from 2018 to 2020 is available at: [https://www.coljuristas.org/centro\\_de\\_documentacion/documento.php?id\\_doc=660](https://www.coljuristas.org/centro_de_documentacion/documento.php?id_doc=660). Data for 2021 is available at: [https://www.coljuristas.org/sala\\_de\\_prensa/articulo.php?id=691](https://www.coljuristas.org/sala_de_prensa/articulo.php?id=691). Data for 2022 is available at: [https://www.coljuristas.org/sala\\_de\\_prensa/articulo.php?id=69](https://www.coljuristas.org/sala_de_prensa/articulo.php?id=69). Data up to 30 June 2023 is available at: [https://coljuristas.org/nuestro\\_quehacer/lideres.php](https://coljuristas.org/nuestro_quehacer/lideres.php).

(3) Early Alert N°019-2023 issued by the Ombuds Office.

(4) It is important to clarify that the updated statistics are available up to March 2023, based on the quarterly bulletins published by Somos Defensores. The latest bulletin can be accessed at: <https://somosdefensores.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Boletin-modelo-2-1-1.pdf>

(5) According to the Somos Defensores Program, there is concern that the plan "has not been sufficiently appropriated by the institutional architecture as a whole, and that the biggest efforts from the national government has been focused on installing what are known as Unified Command Posts for Life (PMUV), which is just one measure, [and] there is also a lack of adequate institutional coordination for implementation." Somos Defensores Program (2023). Interludio. 2022 Annual Report. Sistema de Información sobre Agresiones a Defensores de Derechos Humanos (SIADDDH- Information System on Acts of Aggression Against Human Rights Defenders). p. 119. See: [https://somosdefensores.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/informe-INTERLUDIO-2022\\_PSD.pdf](https://somosdefensores.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/informe-INTERLUDIO-2022_PSD.pdf)

(6) The Unified Command Posts for Life are operational and transitory spaces created as part of the Emergency Plan to manage cases and define security measures.

(7) The Roundtable is a "high-level space led by the Ministry of the Interior, in which civil society spokespersons meet with the heads of government institutions to agree on strategies, actions, and measures that contribute to solving the serious national situation regarding human rights violations against human rights defenders". CCJ (2021). El Proceso Nacional de Garantías para el Ejercicio de la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos en Colombia (The National Process of Guarantees for the Exercise of the Defense of Human Rights in Colombia). p. 11. See: <https://viva.org.co/cajavirtual/svc0716/pdfs/CARTILLA%204%202021.pdf>

Women defenders in territories with a major presence of armed actors continue to be attacked. Compliance with the Comprehensive Guarantees Program for Women Leaders and Defenders is low. Even though it was launched in 2019, there is still no effective and coordinated implementation of this policy in the regions. There is also no action plan for the differential protection of people with diverse orientations and identities.

The invisibility experienced by children who exercise their right to defend human rights is concerning, as they are exposed to risks generated by their actions. (8) The State does not have specific roadmaps that use a children defenders approach to provide guarantees for their actions.

Impunity levels remain high, with limited progress in dismantling illegal armed groups. This is due to an insufficient contribution from the UEI to dismantle the illegal armed groups responsible for crimes against human rights defenders. No progress has been made to identify the political and economic actors who benefit from acts of aggression against defenders. There was just 41% progress with the identification of the perpetrators of these crimes during the evaluation period. (9)

Even though the National Guarantees Commission has advanced in creating a Public Policy on Dismantlement and its corresponding Action Plan, since the new government came to power, these initiatives have not been completed. In the coordination meetings for these instruments, the Attorney General's Office and government oversight bodies have expressed a denialist position regarding the State's role in allowing the strengthening and expansion of the armed groups that have perpetuated aggressions against leaders, defenders, and peace signatories.

## Recommendations

1. Conduct a comprehensive investigation, in accordance with international standards, of acts of aggression against defenders who fight to guarantee rights and lead social causes, as well as children who defend rights, while recognizing the systematic nature and patterns of aggression that could facilitate the potential prosecution of perpetrators and the dismantling of criminal structures, including illegal finance networks that may appear to be legal and have ties to State agents.
2. Guarantee the implementation and binding nature of dialogue spaces between State entities and civil society, such as the National Guarantees Roundtable and the Intersectoral Guarantees Commission for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders, which is responsible for guiding the implementation and monitoring of the Comprehensive Guarantees Program for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders (PIGML) (10), as well as the National Commission on Security Guarantees.
3. Formulate and implement a public policy on guarantees for the defense of human rights, which organizes the different national and local mechanisms and spaces, ensuring the presence of diverse institutions to coordinate actions that provide security for the enjoyment of human rights.

(8) Emblematic cases include the stigmatization and digital threats against the life and integrity of the 11-year-old environmental activist Francisco Vera Manzanares in 2021, as well as the murder of the 14-year-old environmental protector Breiner David Cucuñame in 2022.

(9) This percentage was obtained by comparing the number of cases opened and the percentage of convictions, as outlined in Information Request No. 20225760007621 answered by the Attorney General's Office.

(10) This program is supported by Decree 1314/2016 and Resolution 0845/2018.