

UIA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**STATEMENT IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE
12th DAY OF THE ENDANGERED LAWYER: FOCUS ON COLOMBIA**

Upon the occasion of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the UIA (International Association of Lawyers – Union Internationale des Avocats), on January 21, 2022, we express our full support of the 12th Day of the Endangered Lawyer (DEL) to be held on January 24, and, more particularly, we offer our support for our colleagues in Colombia, which has been chosen as the focus country of the 2022 DEL, for the second time¹.

We are gravely concerned about the dire situation many of our Colombian colleagues face and, particularly, those lawyers providing legal assistance in sensitive cases, such as those involving human rights violations, including cases before the Special Jurisdiction for Peace; environmental cases; land restitution cases; and cases brought against present or past members of the government.

It is clear that despite the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016 -- which officially ended the long-lasting internal armed conflict that has resulted in widespread and countless grave human rights violations -- peace has yet to be achieved. In a country that has historically had one of the highest murder rates for lawyers, Colombia continues to register the highest number of murdered human rights defenders in Latin America.

We therefore deplore that, in the current context of escalating violence, polarisation and social conflict, our colleagues and other justice sector professionals continue to face increasing risks of illegal surveillance; serious threats; harassment, including at the judiciary level; and violence, including murders.

Further, Colombian human rights lawyers are often publicly stigmatised and aligned with their clients' causes. Attacks and threats against lawyers involved in human rights cases fail to be addressed, adequately investigated and/or prosecuted.

Colombian lawyers, as all lawyers worldwide, must be able to freely, independently and safely practice their profession, with no fear of unjustified interference, threats, attacks and improper restrictions from both state and non-state actors.

¹ <https://www.uanet.org/en/actions/january-24-international-day-endangered-lawyers-call-all-lawyers-support-their-colombian>

We therefore join the voices of the international community to draw attention to the situation of our Colombian colleagues and fully support and echo the requests and recommendations addressed in [the joint report of the 12th Day of the Endangered Lawyer](#).

Among them, we specifically reiterate the call to Colombian authorities to ensure that:

- the numerous attacks on human rights lawyers are urgently addressed and that investigations are conducted diligently, exhaustively and impartially, following threats and attacks against legal professionals, in order to identify all those responsible, and that the perpetrators are prosecuted in competent courts in accordance with international fair trial standards;
- all necessary steps are taken to adequately protect the lives of Colombian lawyers, including by adopting all additional and effective security measures to guarantee their safety and freedom;
- all necessary steps are taken, in law and practice, to guarantee that lawyers can practise their profession freely, independently and without actual or threatened harm, prosecution or retaliation, in accordance with established norms, and particularly in accordance with the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, including art. 16 to 23.

We also encourage the establishment of a professional association of lawyers in Colombia that is institutionalized, comprehensively self-governing, democratic, and independent to represent the interests of the Colombian legal profession, assume the role of guardian of the core values of the legal profession in the country, and collaborate with the Colombian government to ensure that lawyers are able to freely, independently and safely counsel and assist their clients, in accordance with international laws and norms, and, particularly, in accordance with the Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers. The UIA and the UIA-IROL stand ready to support relevant efforts in this regard.