

Ambassador Geneviève des Rivières  
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**Re: Assassination of Father José Reinel Restrepo of the municipality of Marmato, Colombia**

Dear Ambassador des Rivières:

In response to news of the murder of Father José Reinel Restrepo, parish priest of the municipality of Marmato in the department of Caldas, Colombia, we would like to express our deep sadness and to raise our concern that Canadian mining companies may well be aggravating or benefiting from violence in this area. We ask that the Canadian Embassy cooperate with investigations to ensure that the facts surrounding Restrepo's murder are brought to light, and to guarantee that Canadian mining companies operating in Colombia are not causing, aggravating, or benefiting from violence and human rights violations.

Father Restrepo's murder comes little more than two weeks after Prime Minister Harper celebrated the coming into effect of the Canada Colombia Free Trade Agreement in Bogotá. While those who put human rights before free trade have been accused of "protectionism," this event once again raises the question about who needs greater protection: Canadian corporations or human rights defenders in Colombia standing up for collective interests in their communities.

On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, the body of Father Restrepo was found shot dead near his motorcycle on a road between the municipality of Belén de Umbría, Departamento of Risaralda and the municipality of Viterbo, department of Caldas, south of the municipality of Marmato. The 36 year-old priest had served for two years in the parish church of Marmato. No perpetrators in this crime have yet been identified, nor has a motive for Father Restrepo's killing been determined.

On September 9<sup>th</sup>, the Regional Indigenous Council of the Department of Caldas and the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective issued a communiqué in which they indicate that Restrepo was an outspoken opponent of the development of an open-pit gold mine that would require the relocation of the entire town of Marmato. He had recently been on a trip to Bogotá in order to investigate information allegedly circulated by Medoro Resources, which recently merged with Toronto-based Gran Colombia Gold, saying that the parish church was up for sale.

"This Canadian multinational company wants to take advantage of the population; they want to drive them out," said Father Restrepo during a recent interview for a Colombian television special. "They have even gone so far as to want to relocate the parish church,

and they've come and asked me if I agree with the relocation of the town. I've ignored them, I've avoided them, and I've also responded saying, no. I've openly told them that I'm not in agreement with this."

"The church is a defender of the poor, the church declares itself in defence of the poor, and the small scale miners of Marmato are at real risk of losing their jobs in this situation... The company doesn't provide them with an alternative to their jobs because the company wants to use open-pit mining by displacing the population and exploiting this area in a short period of time."

The municipality of Marmato has historically relied on small-scale mining activities. Indigenous artisanal mining has taken place for centuries in this area, with afro-colombians and more recently other miners joining in. Besides requiring relocation of the heritage mining town, the proposed large-scale open pit gold mine would compound pressures small-scale miners are already experiencing, having been being declared illegal by the Colombian State. Miners are being cut-off from the supply of explosives, forcing them to use home-made, unsafe techniques. This project also has impacts on ongoing land claims to the area by the Indigenous Embera people whom companies have not recognized.

The Canadian company Colombia Goldfields Ltd originally began working in Marmato in 2005, before Medoro Resources bought them out in 2010. Medoro Resources then merged with Gran Colombia Gold Corp in June 2011, a company in which the Canadian Pension Plan reports holdings of \$6 million CDN. Gran Colombia Gold issued a statement on September 2<sup>nd</sup> with regard to Restrepo's murder stating, "We hope the authorities will fully investigate this crime and swiftly establish what took place. The company reiterates our complete rejection of any acts of violence."

Such statements are not enough.

Echoing the demands of committees, associations and Indigenous councils in Marmato and Caldas, we urge the Canadian Embassy to cooperate with all investigations into this matter in order to ensure that the facts surrounding Restrepo's murder are brought to light. The Embassy should also encourage the company to cooperate fully. Furthermore, in light of the terms of the Canada Colombia Free Trade Agreement, which stipulate an annual report on associated human rights impacts, we also ask that the Canadian Embassy help guarantee that Canadian mining companies operating in Colombia, in the context of the ongoing internal armed conflict, are not causing, aggravating, or benefiting from violence and human rights violations. Finally, we ask that stronger mechanisms be put in place to hold Canadian companies to account in the context of armed conflict as an additional necessary step to signal that the Canadian government takes its human rights obligations seriously.

We look forward for your response and further communications with the Embassy in these regards.

Sincerely,

Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers

Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)

Christian Peacemaker Teams CPT Colombia

Coalition québécoise sur les impacts socio-environnementaux des transnationales en  
Amérique latine

CoDevelopment Canada

Colombia Action Solidarity Alliance (CASA)

Comité pour les droits humains en Amérique latine (CDHAL)

Common Frontiers

Council of Canadians

International Council of Latin American and Caribbean Women in Canada

Inter Pares

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

Latin American and Caribbean Solidarity Network

Latin American Trade Unionists Coalition (LATUC)

Members of the Extractive Industries Research Group (EIRG), York University

Members of the Executive Committee of The Centre for Research on Latin America and  
the Caribbean at York University (CERLAC)

Mining Injustice – Toronto

MiningWatch Canada

Muslim Unity group Toronto

Partners in Mission Unit, The United Church of Canada

PASC (Projet Accompagnement Solidarité Colombie)

Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)

The Steelworkers Humanity Fund

Toronto Haiti Action Committee

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