



PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

Lawyers without Borders Canada (LWBC) expresses its concern regarding the arrest and detention of human rights defenders in Colombia

Bogota, Colombia. July 1, 2017. Lawyers Without Borders Canada (LWBC) expresses its deep concern regarding the arrest and detention of human rights defenders in the community of Ayacucho, located in the municipality La Gloria, department of Cesar, Colombia.

María Montiel, journalist with the community-based communications agency *Colombia Informa* and member of the human rights organization *Equipo Jurídico Pueblos*, **Rommel Duran Castellanos**, lawyer and member of *Equipo Jurídico Pueblos*, **Eliecer Alfonso Vergel**, community leader, and **Jorge Alonso**, community member, were brutally beaten and detained this morning.

Since June 28, residents of Ayacucho have been engaged in a strike after presenting their demands to an oil company, including an invitation to negotiate.

Members of *Equipo Jurídico Pueblos* were in Ayacucho representing the company's union. According to information received, the four individuals have been deprived of their liberty for allegations of obstruction to a public road and violence against a public servant. Initially brought to the police station located in La Gloria, they are now being detained in Aguachica's police station, where they have reported being subjected to mistreatment by authorities.



At Aguachica police station: María Montiel, journalist with Colombia Informa and member of Equipo Jurídico Pueblos; Jorge Alonso; and Rommel Duran Castellanos, lawyer for EJP.



According to information received, Mr. Duran Castellanos intervened with agents of the National Police of Colombia's Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron, aiming to prevent the assault and detention of the community leaders Mr. Vergel and Mr. Alonso, and ensuring the respect of his clients' rights. The agents responded by use of force against them. The journalist, Ms. Montiel, was also physically assaulted by two agents after requesting to put an end to these acts of violence.

LWBC is disturbed by this situation affecting two members of one of its main partners in Colombia. LWBC reiterates that human rights defenders must be able to carry out their duties without any interference, in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1998).

LWBC also reiterates that the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990) establishes that public authorities shall "ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; [...] shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics; [...] and shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions."

LWBC respectfully calls upon Colombian authorities to respect judicial guarantees and the rights of these human rights defenders, and invites human rights organizations in the field to ensure the well-being of the community.

LWBC will continue to closely monitor the situation in the community and of the detainees to ensure the protection of their rights.

[About Lawyers without Borders Canada:](#)

Lawyers without Borders Canada (LWBC) is a non-governmental international development organisation, whose mission is to support the defence of human rights for the most vulnerable groups and individuals, through the reinforcement of access to justice and legal representation. LWBC is active in Colombia since 2003 where she participates in the national dialogue on transitional justice and supports the legal representation of victims of the armed conflict, including in emblematic cases of gross human rights violations.

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