



Peace and... Justice for Colombia

Campaign for life, justice and freedom



Statement from PJFC on the arrest and detention of trade unionist and human rights activist, Lilianny Obando, in Colombia

Peace and Justice for Colombia (PJFC) is a network of people in Australia concerned at the appalling human rights situation in Colombia – particularly as it affects trade unionists, workers and rural communities. It was formed after a visit last year from Lilianny Obando who moved everybody she met with her plea for assistance for the people of Colombia, to help them work for an end to the state-sponsored violence directed against the ordinary men and women of her troubled country.

Lilianny impressed her audiences with her commitment to her work with peasant associations as a member of the peak union council Fensuagro – CUT. When in Australia she met dozens of trade unionists and parliamentarians seeking support for a human rights monitoring project in rural areas of Colombia. She described the challenges presented by state-sponsored violence (including the scarcely imaginable extreme violence used by paramilitary forces) but at no time called for anything but a peaceful solution to the social conflict in her homeland.

We are shocked and outraged that the Government of Colombia, through its Attorney General, has moved to silence this voice of reason by arresting and detaining her last Friday 8th August. The Attorney General had previously announced publicly that Lilianny (along with eleven other critics of the government's human rights record – including members of parliament) was under investigation for links to the FARC guerrilla organisation. The arrest was carried out in Lilianny's apartment in front of her distraught mother and children. She must now defend herself against extremely serious charges of rebellion and managing resources to aid terrorism.

The tactic of raising “links” to guerrilla organisations in Colombia is not new. It is used often and is being used now in an effort to distract public attention from investigations into well-known and well-established links between narco-traffickers and highly placed civil servants and parliamentarians from the governing parties. The latest developments are part of an ongoing witch-hunt against critics of the government of President Alvaro Uribe.

The “evidence” in Lilianny's case is said to have been found on a laptop and other electronic equipment captured by the Colombian armed forces when they invaded Ecuadorean territory in March of this year. The equipment is said to have belonged to Commander Raúl Reyes of the FARC, who was killed in the attack.

The credibility of the “evidence” is widely questioned. INTERPOL cannot vouch for its integrity and notes that it has been manipulated by the Colombian authorities. In a country that respects human rights Lilianny would have no case to answer.

In Colombia she must defend her freedom and that of her compatriots against powerful vested interests in order to pursue peace with social justice in their homeland.

We call on all fair-minded and peace-loving Australians to join us in our demand for the immediate release of Liliyany Obando from custody, the dropping of all the bogus charges against her and for the government of Colombia to guarantee her safety. We ask people of goodwill to sign onto this statement and to send it on to the addresses of Colombian Government officials listed below and cc your letters or emails to:

Email: info@colombiasolidarity.net

Website: www.colombiasolidarity.net

In peace,

Peace and Justice for Colombia,
11/08/08

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