

Please join us in calling on Colombian authorities to protect the rights of Ricardo Esquivia Ballestas

We are global recipients of Tanenbaum's *Peacemakers in Action* Award and peace-builders from armed conflicts across the world. Spanning different religions, beliefs and conflicts, we have experienced war, reconciliation and, at times, political persecution by those who profit from war and attempt to undermine movements of justice and peace. As a Network, we are a powerful voice with connections to the highest levels of government and civil society. When we speak with one voice, our calls are heard.

Today, we, the *Peacemakers in Action* Network, ask that YOU join us in speaking with one voice to call on the Colombian authorities to end religious harassment and political persecution of Ricardo Esquivia, our fellow *Peacemaker*, a Mennonite and a lifelong peace activist, as well as the staff and volunteers of the peace movement affiliated with the Sembrandopaz, and peasant community leaders of Alta Montaña of Montes de Maria.

Credible sources share alarming information about escalating threats to these individuals in an effort to undermine the non-violent peace movement in Montes de Maria. Though some details remain unconfirmed, we *Peacemakers in Action* believe the information received to be trustworthy. We call on the Colombian authorities to take heed of the mounting evidence that Ricardo and his associates' lives and safety are at risk.

- In recent weeks, several community leaders in Montes de Maria have received written death threats.
- On September 9, 2013, a trusted associate, of Ricardo Esquivia, Jorge Luis Montes Hernandez, was arrested on reportedly false charges.
- Sources confirm that Colombia's military is manufacturing a case against *Peacemaker* Ricardo Esquivia, accusing him of being a guerrilla associated with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.

As the *Peacemakers in Action* Network, we stand firmly with our brother, Ricardo Esquivia, and ask that YOU join us by calling upon the Colombian authorities to take the following actions:

- Ensure the immediate and complete protection of the lives and well-being of Ricardo Esquivia Ballestas and the other community leaders of the Alta Montaña of Montes de Maria, and the staff and volunteers of the Asociación Sembrando Semillas de Paz, 'Sembrandopaz'.
- Release Ricardo Esquivia's associate, Jorge Luis Montes Hernandez, from the maximum security prison where he is allegedly being held without concrete evidence.

- Conduct an immediate, thorough and transparent investigation into the current political and religious persecution of Ricardo Esquivia, the staff and volunteers of the peace movement affiliated with the Sembrandopaz, and peasant community leaders of Alta Montaña of Montes de Maria.
- Identify and organize a face-to-face dialogue with the perpetrators of this persecution to put an end to these false allegations.
- Ensure the cessation of harassment against foreign volunteers of the Mennonite Church working with Sembrandopaz as part of their faith as members of a historic peace church.

By calling the leaders below, sending your own message, the sample letter below and/or disseminating our statement so that others will join this critical cause, YOU can help ensure their safety. Below is an example letter to Colombian Officials. Feel free to use this letter or send your own to the following:

- Your own country's ambassadors in Colombia
- The Colombian ambassador in your country
- The State Department or its equivalent in your country, demanding that they and their ambassadors pressure the Colombian authorities
- Human rights organizations
- The following Colombian officials:

Juan Manuel Santos Calderón
Presidente de la República

Carrera 8 No. 7 -26, Palacio de Nariño, Bogotá, D.C.

Fax: [\(+571\) 596 0631](tel:+5715960631)

E-mail: buzon1@presidencia.gov.co

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Juan Carlos Pinzón Bueno
Ministro de Defensa

Avenida El Dorado con Carrera 52, CAN, Bogotá D.C.

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PETITION: We also ask that you sign this petition to help Ricardo and the leaders of the High Mountain zone who facing political persecution. Please sign! <http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/stop-political-persecution>

As the *Peacemakers in Action* Network, we stand as a voice for peace and justice. Today, we call on YOU to ensure the Colombian authorities to heed our demands and end political persecution of Ricardo Esquivia and his associates in Montes de Maria – immediately!

***Peacemakers in Action* Network**

Ricardo Esquivia – Colombia
Canon Andrew White – Iraq
Dr. William Lowrey – USA/ South Sudan
José “Chencho” Alas – El Salvador
Pastor James Wuye – Nigeria
Imam Muhammad Ashafa – Nigeria
Azi Hussain – Pakistan
Dr. Ephraim Isaac – Ethiopia

Dr. Yehezkel Landau – USA/ Israel
Jamila Afghani – Afghanistan
Hind Kabawat – Syria
Friar Ivo Markovic – Bosnia & Herzegovina
Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge – South Africa
Father Sava Janjic - Kosovo
Dishani Jayaweera – Sri Lanka
Dr. Benny Giay – West Papua



SAMPLE LETTER

Dear [OFFICIAL],

I am writing to express my deep concern for the physical safety and right to due process of Ricardo Esquivia Ballestas. According to credible sources, he faces threats and accusations intended to lead to his imprisonment or affect his physical safety. This is similar to events that took place in 1989, 1993 and 2004 in which Colombian authorities actions against Ricardo based on false accusations, which were later dismissed as unfounded.

Ricardo Esquivia is the Director of Asociación Sembrando Semillas de Paz (Sembrandopaz) a church-based organization located on the Caribbean Coast of Colombia and which has received support from the United States Institute for Peace and Mennonite Central Committee, among others. Sembrandopaz accompanies and supports communities affected by the armed conflict to peacefully reconcile differences and build a better future.

The threat comes in the context of Sembrandopaz's recent work supporting citizen initiatives of small farmers in the Montes de María region for the right to reparation, the return to their lands in safety and State assistance in addressing the agricultural crisis caused by the death of avocado plantations in more than 40 rural communities. In addition to the threats against Ricardo Esquivia, leaders of this citizen movement have also been threatened, and in one case already detained.

Ricardo Esquivia has promoted peace and community development in the region for over 40 years, as evidenced by international peace awards from the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He is co-founder and former Director of the Commission for Restoration, Life and Peace of the Evangelical Council of Churches of Colombia (CEDECOL). He is also the founder and former Director of the Christian Center for Justice, Peace and Nonviolent Action of the Mennonite Church of Colombia. For many years he represented all non-Catholic religious groups on the National Peace Council, which advises the President of Colombia.

[NOTE: If writing to Colombian government officials, continue as follows:]

I respectfully call on you to make a public pronouncement in support of the safety, due process, and rights of Ricardo Esquivia and of the leaders of the communities in Montes de María, specifically El Carmen de Bolívar, demand an investigation of the threats and unfounded arrest of Jorge Montes, and take all steps within your power and authority to stop the harassment of grass-roots, peace building processes, guaranteed by citizens' rights in the constitution of Colombia and international human rights law.

I also request that you inform me of the steps that are taken.

[Note: If writing to government representatives from other countries, continue as follows:]

I respectfully request that you address the Colombian officials by calling on them to make a public pronouncement in support of the safety, due process, and rights of Ricardo Esquivia and of the leaders of the communities in Montes de María, specifically El Carmen de Bolívar, demand an investigation of the threats and unfounded arrest of Jorge Montes, and take all steps within your power and authority to stop the harassment of grass-roots, peace building processes, guaranteed by citizens' rights in the constitution of Colombia and international human rights law.

I also request that you inform me of the steps that are taken.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

[YOUR NAME and contact information]