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Colombia: Lack of protection after new death threat and attack against human rights defender Guillermo Pérez Rangel

On 20 May 2022, human rights defender **Guillermo Pérez Rangel** was physically attacked by two unknown individuals who threatened him with death, insulted him and beat him on different parts of his body at a Transmilenio station in the centre of Bogotá. Guillermo Pérez Rangel has a long history of defending human and environmental rights, and has suffered previous attacks and threats that led to his inclusion in the National Protection Unit (UNP) in 2016. Despite this, the human rights defender has no effective measures for his protection. Guillermo Pérez Rangel has been displaced from his home territory since February 2020 as a result of threats he has suffered for his social leadership. Guillermo Pérez Rangel reports that neither the authorities, nor the UNP have reacted to the latest events despite the fact that he reported that he was being followed by unknown individuals to the Attorney General's Office on 29 April 2022.

Guillermo Pérez Rangel is a peasant, human rights defender and social leader from the department of Cesar. He is currently the president of the Mesa de Derechos Humanos y Territorios del Cesar, executive director of the Asociación de Campesinos y Comunidades Sin Tierra del Cesar and a member of the Unión Nacional de Integración Rural UNIR. Guillermo Pérez Rangel supported the dialogues to sign the peace accords in 2016. He continuously has opposed large-scale mining extraction projects and led land recovery processes. By working for the vindication of the rights of victims of the armed conflict and the restitution of land to peasants dispossessed by paramilitarism, he has received multiple threats in recent years.

On the morning of 20 May 2022, after having conducted an interview at the offices of the television channel Tele Sur, the human rights defender realised that he was being followed by two unknown individuals. Hours later, while he was on his way home from work, the men intercepted him at the bus station, threw him to the ground, threatened him and beat him on his head and body.

The human rights defender believes that the new threat and attack against him may be directly related to the public denunciations that he and other human rights defenders and organisations have made in recent months. The human rights defenders and organisations have been denouncing the killing of Guillermo Pérez Rangel's colleague and human rights defender **Teófilo Acuña** on 22 February 2022 in the village of Puerto Oculto, municipality of San Martín, department of Cesar.

Front Line Defenders condemns the systematic lack of effective protection of Guillermo Pérez Rangel, who finds himself in a situation of economic and social vulnerability due to his displacement. For two years, no effective measures have been implemented to safeguard his life or any conditions that would allow him to return to the territory. The above threats and requests for adjustments to the protection measures were formally communicated to the UNP by the human

rights defender and Front Line Defenders, however thus far there have been no concrete responses.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the physical and psychological health of Guillermo Pérez Rangel, as well as the chilling effect that these attacks have on human rights defenders, in particular those who are also seeking to avail themselves of the protection mechanism in scenarios of risk and threats. The situation of vulnerability of human rights defenders in the country requires a forceful response from Colombian institutions.

Front Line Defenders urges the Colombian authorities to:

1. Conduct an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the surveillance of and attack against Guillermo Pérez Rangel, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Strongly and publicly condemn the attack against human rights defender Guillermo Pérez Rangel;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of the human rights defender, as well as that of his family, in constant consultation with them;
4. Guarantee that all human rights defenders in Colombia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free from all restrictions, including judicial harassment.