

PRESS ADVISORY NOTICE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 30 AUGUST 2018

20 International lawyers and human rights experts to travel to Colombia as the International Caravana of Jurists in defence of human rights, as violence escalates and new presidency begins.

From 1 to 8 September 2018, 20 international lawyers and human rights experts, from seven countries, will be in Colombia for an intense week to undertake a fact-finding mission and advocate for the protection of human rights lawyers and defenders. The delegation takes place at a time when the peace process hangs in the balance, violence across the country has escalated dramatically, and a new presidential administration has just taken office.

Since the signing of the Peace Agreement in November 2016, hundreds of human rights defenders have been assassinated and the UN has called for decisive action to stem the tide of violence enveloping many regions. Colombian's official state Ombudsman has reported that a human rights defender is killed every three days. The 2018 presidential election was highly polarised and divisions across society have deepened in the past two years, since the last delegation of the International Caravana.

On 1 September 2018, the 6th International Caravana of Jurists will begin in Bogota, Colombia. The group will travel to five regions outside of the capital (Antioquia; Bolívar; Nariño; Norte de Santander; Santander; Valle del Cauca) to meet with victims, lawyers, judges, and many others to gather a first-hand account of the current situation, particularly in relation to peace and transitional justice. The delegation will also seek to hold meetings with regional and federal authorities and with government representatives to discuss challenges and share concerns regarding the safety of human rights lawyers. Further, the group will seek dialogue with the diplomatic community to understand international strategies and initiatives for peace, justice and protection of human rights lawyers.

Charlotte Gill, Chair of the Colombian Caravana (UK), said:

“This year’s delegation feels as if it could not be timelier. It is shocking that violence is escalating to the extent that it is and that victims are being re-victimised and further traumatised in the process. We travel to Colombia with open-eyes and ears to hear from those facing down this violence and to understand first-hand from the Colombian state the steps it will take to foster peace.

The Colombian Caravana has been working with our Colombian counterparts for ten-years now and we undertake this sixth delegation with a steely determination to up our efforts to support those lawyers who despite the threats they face, continue to seek justice and peace for the communities whom they represent.”

Judith Lichtenberg, Chair of Lawyers for Lawyers (Netherlands), said:

“Lawyers are at the forefront of human rights protection and promotion. When the legal profession is not able to function independently or effectively, this gives rise to human rights violations, impunity and injustice. Fundamental to improving the human rights situation for people in Colombia is to ensure that lawyers can do their work without fear of harassment or intimidation.

The International Caravana is of great value because it increases the visibility of the work of Colombian lawyers and the difficulties they are facing. This makes it possible for Lawyers for Lawyers to support those lawyers who are experiencing difficulties in exercising their professional activities.”

Michele Lucherini, President of Federation of European Bars (FBE), said:

“The Federation of European Bars is proud to be a partner in the International Caravana of Jurists 2018. We support the defence of human rights and the courageous lawyers who defend human rights in Colombia. The FBE represents the bar associations of the members of the Council of Europe, and is committed to the rule of law, access to justice and the defence of human rights. Our members participate in the 2018 delegation and we congratulate the Caravana for 10 years of international solidarity to lawyers in Colombia.”

Pedro Pais de Almeida, president of International Association of Lawyers (UIA), said:

“UIA is committed to supporting the legal profession in promoting and upholding the rule of law and human rights. For more than 90 years, UIA has been defending the right of lawyers to practice their profession with full freedom and independence, without intimidation, harassment or interference. It is an honour to support once more the Caravana and, through its work, Colombian human rights lawyers who have consistently demonstrated their commitment to justice and peace.”

Notes:

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY: A solidarity vigil will be held on **Thursday, 6 September at 6.30pm in Bogota**, bringing together the international delegation and sending a visual shared message calling for peace and justice. Press are invited to attend to take photos and/or interview delegates. A press release outlining the details of this event will be made available nearer the time. Should you wish to attend, please contact us and we can provide you with further details to facilitate press access.

PRESS CONFERENCE: A press conference will be held **in Bogota at 10.30am, Thursday, 6 September** to present initial findings. For reasons of security, should you wish to attend, please contact us in advance. An embargoed press release with early findings and quotes in English and Spanish will be made available in advance to interested parties.

INTERVIEWS: Delegates are available for interviews in advance, during, and after the delegation in **English, Spanish, French, Italian, and Dutch**. Colombian human rights lawyers may also be available for interview. We can provide interpreting into English from Spanish for interviews, if needed.

CONTACT: To arrange interviews or for any other related press enquiries, please contact colombian.caravana@gmail.com or Whatsapp **+44 7904 361 420**. Please direct your communication in Spanish or English.