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COLOMBIA

TWO RELATIVES OF ENVIRONMENTAL MEMBERS KILLED

On 22 September, two relatives of members of the Rios Vivos Movement were killed in Antioquia, Colombia. These killings come after several other killings of environmental human rights defenders. All are members of the same movement, and all are affected by the environmental and human rights impact of the Hidroituango dam construction.

On 22 September, unidentified men shot to death **the nephew of Rubén Areiza**, a member of the Rios Vivos Movement (Movimiento Ríos Vivos Antioquia, MRVA). He was returning from a sport event in the Briceño municipality, Antioquia department, northwest Colombia. Another man was injured in the attack. On the same day, **the son of a former member of MRVA** was killed with a sharp object in the Valdivia municipality, also in Antioquia.

These later killings came after several others. On 8 May, **Luis Alberto Torres Montoya**, a member of MRVA and the Association of Artisanal Miners and Fishermen of Puerto Valdivia, and his brother **Duvián Andrés Correa Sánchez** were killed by unidentified assailants. A few days before, **Hugo Albeiro George Pérez**, also a member of MRVA, and his nephew **Domar Egidio Zapata George** were killed by unidentified assailants. These events took place the same day that MRVA organized a demonstration where 160 people gathered to express their concerns over flooding and the risk of avalanches in their communities. The flooding and risk of avalanches are due to heavy rain blocking a tunnel built by the Hidroituango hydroelectric project. This blockage caused an increase in water levels that, according to MRVA, affected at least 45 families.



Protests against the hydroelectric project in May.

Photo credit: <https://peoplesdispatch.org/>

Since 2008, the Movement has campaigned against the Hidroituango hydroelectric project. They have denounced the damages that the dam has brought to the area, first as Process of Communities Affected by Hidroituango (Proceso de Comunidades Afectadas por Hidroituango) and from 2011, as MRVA.

Further appeals would be valuable, urging the authorities

- * to conduct a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation of the people killed. The investigation must take into account their membership to MRVA and their relationship to MRVA members and former members, and must bring all those found responsible to justice;
- * to fully and immediately implement the collective Prevention and Protection Plan for MRVA members;
- * to take immediate steps to overcome the structural causes behind the threats, killings and attacks faced by human rights defenders in the context of the Hidroituango hydroelectric project.

Direct your messages to

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Salutation: Dear Attorney General

Ministry of Interior

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Please send a copy to

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Additional information

Construction of the Hidroituango hydroelectric project began in 2010. The dam is located on the Cauca river in Antioquia, Colombia. One of the stated activities of the project includes the “temporary diversion of the Cauca river” amongst other activities. According to Ríos Vivos, more than 500 families have been displaced as a consequence of the project to date. Hidroituango’s own social and environmental impact study states that the communities of Orobajo and Barbacoas in the area “will be completely flooded” as a result of the project.

The dam is being built by EPM Ituango, a consortium of the Medellín Energy Company (Empresas Pùblicas de Medellín, EPM) and the department of Antioquia government. The project is also partly financed by the Inter-American Development Bank.

In the context of protests against the Hidroituango hydroelectric project, Ríos Vivos reports that 151 attacks have been carried out against its members, and three members have been killed. A further two attempts have reportedly been made against the lives of its members, and more than 60 threats have been recorded.

On 20 April 2018, 25 members of the European parliament sent a letter to the Colombian authorities expressing their concern about the situation of the inhabitants of this area before the imminent filling of the dam. They expressed great concern regarding the fact that the dam is located in an area with the presence of mass graves and scattered bodies, to date 159 bodies have been exhumed, but there is a high probability that many more bodies will be found there. A collective Prevention and Protection plan was granted to members of the Ríos Vivos movement in 2013, however, to date, authorities have reportedly not initiated implementation of this plan. To this regard, a group of deputies from Sweden sent a letter requesting the implementation of the MRVA Prevention and Protection Plan.