

More social leaders murdered in Colombia



Bogota, January 7 (RHC)-- Another Colombian rights activist was shot to death in her home for helping Afro-Colombian victims in the country's long civil conflict.

A mother of four, Maritza Quiroz Leiva, was gunned down by armed hitmen in her rural home in San Isidro in Colombia's Caribbean region. Quiroz was an Afro-Colombian representative on the Santa Marta Victim's Roundtable working on reparations for the torture, kidnapping, displacement, and sexual violence that vulnerable victims in the region experienced during the country's 50 year conflict.

In late December, Quiroz had taken part in a government land redistribution ceremony in the Santa Marta region, part of the 2016 peace accords between the government and the former Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC). Colombia has one of Latin America's biggest land access disparities where "0.1 percent of farms are ... over 2,000 hectares in size and control 60 percent of land, while 81 percent of farms cover an area of only two hectares and occupy less than 5 percent of (arable) land" in Colombia, according to a 2014 Oxfam report.

Quiroz and some 7.7 million people in Colombia have been internally displaced because of the armed conflict that supposedly ended with the peace agreement. However, over 400 land and human rights activists in rural and Caribbean regions have been gunned down by paramilitary groups hired mainly by drug traffickers since the accord went into effect in November 2016.

The hitmen broke into her rural home and shot her as her 22-year-old son hid. He later found his mother badly injured just outside their farm as Quiroz had tried to flee. She later died from the bullet wounds in a Santa Marta hospital, according to local media.

Maritza Quiroz Leiva was the sixth victim of violence in Colombia in the first six days of the New Year. So far, 90 campesino social leaders have been killed since President Ivan Duque took office in August 2018. The right-wing head of state has been criticized for his indifference to the number of murders and for not structurally addressing the situation that has only worsened since his inauguration.

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