

Colombian NGOs condemn arrest of 30 Indigenous and social leaders over 'links to ELN'



Bogota, April 23 (RHC)-- Non-governmental and social organizations in Colombia have denounced the arrest of 30 human rights advocates and social leaders in the southeast provinces of Valle del Cauca, Cauca, and Nariño over their alleged links to the National Liberation Army (ELN). The five groups, which work in the region, published a joint statement announcing the arrest of “several leaders of the Indigenous and Afro-Descendants communities” and calling for their release.

The Association for Social Research and Action, the Intercultural University of the Peoples, the Process of Black Communities, the Victims’ Movement and the Peoples’ Congress said in the statement “we have not been able to determine where some of the detained people have been taken, and there is no official statement by the competent authorities.”

Sara Quiñonez and Tulia Valencia -- mother and daughter -- are among those detained. According to local newspaper El Espectador, they are part of the community council of Alto Mira and Frontera and have been victims of forced displacement twice. Quiñonez, who is well known for fighting for the individual and collective rights of the Afro-Colombian community, was first forced to move in 2015

after receiving threats for her work as president of the community's council. Two years later, in 2017 she had to move again after another series of threats.

The NGOs have called on the national and international community to “accompany this request and urgently demand guarantees for life and the defense of human rights” for those who have been arrested. According to the joint statement, many of the people detained participated in the peace talks between the ELN and the Colombian government in Quito. “They have been accused rebellion and linked to the armed group.”

In February, around 40 social organizations met with the ELN in Quito to ask the insurgent group to resume peace talks with the Colombian government, which were threatened after an ELN attack against Colombia state security forces prompted president Juan Manuel Santos to withdraw from the negotiations.

In March, the government and the ELN decided to resume peace talks, however, last week Ecuadorean President Lenin Moreno announced Quito will no longer be a guarantor of peace talks and will not host the fifth cycle.

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