



Mural in Memory of the Victims of the La Gabarra Massacre, La Pista 20.08.24



# Interim report

## 8th Caravana of jurists to Colombia

*Presented by*  
*Colombian Caravana UK*

London  
29th October 2024



## Introduction

The International Caravana of Jurists was created in response to the call from lawyers in Colombia who were at risk. Through the campaign ‘Without lawyers, there is no justice,’ they managed to gather legal professionals from around the world. Sixteen years later, the Caravana still plays a key role in monitoring the situation of lawyers and human rights defenders in Colombia every two years, with the support of international organisations. This year, the 8th International Delegation included eight organisations and 22 lawyers from Europe, Canada, and South America. In 2024, the delegation focused on the barriers to accessing justice, especially from the perspectives of ethnic groups, peasants, gender, and victims. In August, the Caravana visited five important regions and documented serious human rights violations, while also noting the local efforts to resist these challenges.

## Key findings

### 1. Increased risks for human rights defenders & lawyers who represent them:

Human rights defenders in Colombia face increasing violence due to the growing power of illegal armed groups like FARC dissidents, ELN, and the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC). The lack of funding and also coordination between state institutions makes it harder to protect these defenders, especially vulnerable groups such as women, children, indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, and rural communities.

### 3. Conflict for control:

Various regions in Colombia are being contested by different armed groups, each aiming to dominate the socio-economic and political landscape, both in rural and urban areas, the region are as follow:

2. **Human rights violations:** Caravana found widespread human rights abuses, including forced displacement, land dispossession, environmental destruction, gender-based violence, murders, threats, extortion, and the recruitment of minors by armed groups. Impunity is widespread, with only 10% of cases involving social leaders being resolved, and 90% of violations left unpunished overall.

**Caribbean and Sierra Nevada:** Armed groups, such as the Gaitanistas, compete for control over political, social, and economic influence in this region, including both rural and urban areas.

**Putumayo and Caquetá:** The Second Marquetalia and FARC's Central General Staff control these territories, which are strategic for drug production and smuggling routes.

**Urban and trafficking corridors** In cities like Buenaventura and Medellin, urban gangs and AGC factions fight for control of key trafficking routes, including cocaine trade and migration pathways.



Gathering of Victims of the Genocidal Process Tibu. 20.08.24

#### 4. Peace process under President Petro:

President Petro's 'total peace' policy aimed to negotiate with groups like the ELN and FARC's Central General Staff. However, talks have faced difficulties, and many communities feel the situation has worsened. A shift in government strategy toward drug seizures has led to increased extortion by criminal groups.

### Examples of key human rights cases

**Tibú (Catatumbo)**, communities have faced heavy militarisation and control by armed groups. Despite threats, community memory projects are being used to defend their rights and demand justice.

**Cartagena (Bolívar)**, Afro-Colombian women like Luz Nelly Chico continue to seek justice after suffering gender-based violence and forced displacement, but they face a justice system that revictimises them.



Afrocolombian woman at forum on the challenges of access to justice, Cartagena

**Magdalena**, ecofeminist organisations as Asocolemad (Association of Women Lawyers) & Asomuproca (Rural Association of Fisherwomen), are actively fighting against land dispossession and environmental destruction. Their efforts underscore the link between gender inequality and environmental exploitation, highlighting the interconnected struggles of women and the environment.

**Valle del Cauca**, women-led organisations have taken the lead in searching for those who have disappeared. Meanwhile, the indigenous lawyers of Nasa community have proposed an indigenous justice framework to address the recruitment of children by armed groups. Since the peace process was signed, approximately 600 children have been forcibly recruited in this region alone..

**Bogota JEP Case 03**, magistrates working on JEP Case 03, which investigates extrajudicial executions, are facing serious threats, including assassination attempts and death threats, with limited protection. Despite the case's progress, particularly in identifying victims from mass graves, the safety of those involved remains at high risk.



Visit to Ciénaga de la Magdalena. Santa Marta 20.08.24



Caravanistas at JEP's meeting. Bogotá 23.08.24

## Recommendations for the International Community

**Protect human rights defenders:** the international community can help by supporting relocation programs for those at risk, providing legal assistance, and raising awareness about their situation.

**Prioritise environmental protection of fragile ecosystems:** support stronger environmental protections in Colombia's conflict-affected regions, where armed groups are exploiting fragile ecosystems through deforestation, illegal mining, and coca cultivation. Resources should be directed towards sustainable development initiatives that empower local communities.

### Conclusions

The 2024 International Caravana of Jurists has highlighted persistent challenges in Colombia's justice system and the protection of human rights. Many vulnerable communities, including ethnic minorities, women, and rural populations, continue to face significant threats from illegal armed groups, compounded by underfunded and poorly coordinated state institutions.

Both the mainstream justice system and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) are hindered by delays, lack of resources, and widespread impunity. These issues threaten the progress of the peace process and undermine trust in the justice system. To overcome these barriers, international support—both financial and political—is crucial to strengthen the justice sector and safeguard human rights defenders.

**Supporting justice systems to booster the Peace Process:** provide both financial and political support to fully implement the Peace Agreement. Colombia's justice system, including the JEP and mainstream courts, faces significant delays due to resource shortages and threats to legal professionals and victims. While the JEP has made progress with restorative justice, it still lacks adequate funding and protection for all involved. The mainstream justice system also requires more resources to speed up sentencing and enforce rulings.

The exploitation of Colombia's fragile ecosystems by armed groups and international corporations remains a serious concern. Strong international collaboration is needed to protect these ecosystems and support sustainable development in conflict-affected areas.

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