URGENT ACTION

GUARANTEE SAFETY OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

On October 11, Yuly Velásquez president of FEDEPESAN, a federation of fishers' associations in Santander and the Magdalena Medio region, received a phone call and text messages summoning her to a meeting to demand a "contribution" - an extortion payment - and was threatened she would be "made to cry with her family" that same day if she did not comply. Yuly's was recently acknowledged as "Defender of the Year" at the National Human Rights Awards 2026. We call on the Colombian government to implement effective policies to protect human rights defenders and enable them to work free from threats and intimidation.

TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter to the government official(s) listed. Use the sample letter below as a guide or use your own words.
- Click here to report your action(s) on ***Fourth UA 16.25***. We share this number with the officials we are trying to persuade.

Minister of Interior
Carrera 8 # 7 – 83,
Bogotá D.C., Colombia
Email: servicioalciudadano@mininterior.gov.co
Minister of Interior X: @MinInterior

Ministry's Human Rights Directorate
Email: direccionddhh@mininterior.gov.co
(Note: Some have received failure to send notifications for these international email addresses)

Send a copy of your letter to the address below

CC: Colombian Embassy in the United States
Ambassador Daniel García-Peña Jaramillo
1724 Massachusetts Ave, NW,
Washington, DC 20036
Email: eestadosunidos@cancilleria.gov.co
(Note: This email for the Colombian Embassy seems to be working without issue)

Dear Minister,

I am concerned about the threats against **Yuly Velásquez**, her family, and her colleagues. Yuly is president of FEDEPESAN (the Federation of Artisanal, Environmental and Tourist Fishers of Santander). Her work defending artisanal fishing, her community's rights, and the environment and water bodies surrounding Barrancabermeja has earned her several awards, most recently including the "Defender of the Year" award at Colombia's National Human Rights Awards in September 2026.

On October 11, Yuly received a phone call and text messages from the number 314 5942494, summoning her to a meeting to demand a "contribution" - an extortion payment - and was threatened she would be "made to cry with her family" that same day if she did not comply. The caller further threatened that anyone who refused to pay would be "put down" by his men, even if they were "hanging around with two or three bodyguards". This appeared to refer directly to the protection scheme provided to FEDEPESAN by the National Protection Unit (UNP). For years, Yuly and FEDEPESAN have defended their community's right to clean water and a healthy environment. Extortion demands and threats by armed groups undermine their ability to defend human rights.

I urge you to coordinate with the relevant authorities to assess the risks faced by human rights defenders and organizations, such as FEDEPESAN, that defend their territories and the environment, and to implement effective measures to ensure their protection and prevent attacks against them.

Yours sincerely,

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Magdalena Medio is an extensive valley between Colombia's mountain ranges, traversed by the country's main river, the Magdalena. Oil is a major economic activity: Colombia's largest refinery operates in Barrancabermeja, the region's urban center. Because of its location and abundant resources, the region is considered strategic and has long been disputed by the state and armed groups. It has also been a hub of popular mobilization and human rights advocacy for decades. In this context, violence has been persistent against human rights defenders since at least the 1980s. In recent years, the region has experienced alarming levels of violence against civilians, particularly homicides and forced displacement, amid clashes between armed groups. These include the Ejército Gaitanista de Colombia (EGC), also known as the AGC or Clan del Golfo, Colombia's largest armed group with the broadest territorial control; dissident groups made up of the former FARC guerrilla; the ELN guerrilla group; and local gangs aligned with one or more of these groups.

The Federation of Artisanal, Environmentalist, and Tourist Fishers of Santander (FEDEPESAN) works in Ciénaga de San Silvestre, a lake near Barrancabermeja. In addition to promoting sustainable fishing, they monitor water quality and biodiversity, including endangered. Together with the human rights organization, CREDHOS, FEDEPESAN filed a collective legal action that led to a July 2025 ruling (confirmed in May 2026) confirming that water pollution in the San Silvestre area violated the right to a healthy environment and ordering accountability. FEDEPESAN has also denounced pollution by regional companies, corruption by environmental authorities, and the presence of armed groups seeking control of the territory and its water bodies.

In this context, FEDEPESAN´s president **Yuly Velásquez** has experienced numerous forms of violence documented by Amnesty International, including a threat in November 2020, bullet impacts on her home in January 2021, intimidations during protest activities in August 2021, firearm attacks in May and July 2022 (injuring a security guard of her protection scheme). Amnesty International has monitored state actions to detect the risks faced by the fisherpersons of Barrancabermeja, such as the early warning AT 027 of 2022 by the Ombudsperson Office and meetings of the early warnings follow up commission CIPRAT led by the Ministry of Interior. Despite the actions and attention paid by authorities, threats and other forms of pressure persist, as does the need for more comprehensive protection measures to guarantee the right to defend rights in these regions.

FEDEPESAN received the 2024 Human Rights Award by Amnesty International Germany for their work protecting the water, the environment and the rights of the artisanal fisherpersons, and in September 2026, received the "Defender of the Year" award at Colombia's National Human Rights Award.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish or your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: December 31, 2026

NAME AND PREFFERED PRONOUN: FEDEPESAN - Federation of Artisanal, Environmentalist, and Touristic Fisherpersons (They/them)

PREVIOUS UA: https://www.amnestyusa.org/urgent-actions/colombia-stop-harassment-against-fishing-community/