



## Urgent appeal for the protection of the life and integrity of the communities and social leaders of Sur de Bolívar.

30 April 2024

**International Civil Society Organisations signatories of this statement issue an urgent alert regarding worrying situation facing communities in Sur de Bolívar.**

Social, regional, and national social organisations, funds, programmes and international protections organisations in Colombia, as well as the international NGOs working in Colombia, emphatically **reject the assassination of Narciso Beleño**, which occurred in Santa Rosa del Sur, on Sunday 21 April 2024. Narciso was a long-standing peasant leader and President of the Federación Agrominera del Sur de Bolívar, who led the struggle of the communities of Sur de Bolívar and Magdalena Medio in their efforts to achieve a dignified life, free from violence. His work for the construction of peace and social justice was tireless, and his death leaves those living in the territory in a state of anxiety.

**We note with great concern** that how situation in the sub-region of southern Bolívar, in the last week and a half, according to information from social organisations, social media and the authorities, has suffered the violent incursion of the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia. Narciso's murder adds to multiple aggressions, including arbitrary detentions of community members and murders in the municipalities of Morales and Arenal. On 21 April 2024, approximately 150 people from the communities of the village of Micoahumado, and other villages in Morales, were forcibly displaced towards the municipal capital of Morales, taking refuge in the Vicente Hondarza education centre to protect their lives and integrity.

**We support the community's repeated alerts**, reports from civil society, the alerts, and hearings from the Ombudsman's office and the continuous appeals of civil society organisations regarding the desperate situation facing the communities of Sur de Bolívar. The communities of this region have the right to remain in their territories and to live a life free from all forms of violence. They have the right to state protection and action from the armed forces, local authorities, the Prosecutor's Office, and the judges to guarantee that illegal armed organisations do not act in this territory in a criminal manner and with full impunity. The communities of Sur de Bolívar have the right to expect that state actors, in particular the armed forces, act in accordance with the law, and that all those involved in the armed conflict unconditionally abide by the norms and principles of international humanitarian law.

As Colombian civil society organisations, and supporting international organisations, we ask that the communities in the Sur de Bolívar can be protected effectively, that structural solutions be guaranteed so that this violence does not continue, that social leaders and the right to defend rights be protected, and that the participation in the peace process does not generate further risk for the communities and their leaders.

We express our deepest sympathy for Narciso's family, friends and the communities that received his work for so many years. We hope that this crime and the thousands of aggressions perpetrated in the Sur de Bolívar are investigated and sanctioned by the judicial system, and that an end will be put to the horror and suffering of the communities that live and work under the siege of the criminal armed groups that dominate the region. Given the long history of vulnerability of the people of this region and the decades of neglect, silence and ineffectiveness by the authorities, President Petro's government should lead coordinated and effective state action to stop the barbarism in this corner of the Magdalena Medio.