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IPB Statement On The Police Brutality Against Peaceful Protesters in Colombia

According to the last report of Temblores, a non-governmental organization that monitors state violence, 1708 cases of police brutality, 222 victims of physical violence by the police, 37 victims of homicide in hands of police, 831 arbitrary arrests, and 10 victims of sexual assault by the public force have been registered from April 28th until May 5th in Colombia.

Colombian civil society initiated national protests against a presidential Tax Reform project which was withdrawn last Sunday after several demonstrations organized by different sectors and groups of the society. However, protesters have also opposed a number of controversial measures taken by the current government, including a health reform bill and problems with the implementation of the Peace Agreement.

Since the demonstrations started, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly, Clément Voule, has expressed his concerns about police brutality against protesters. Moreover, the spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Marta Hurtado, said in a statement: *“We are deeply alarmed at developments in the city of Cali in Colombia, where police opened fire on demonstrators protesting against tax reforms, reportedly killing and injuring several people”*.

In light of these events, which have left several people killed or injured, IPB urges the European Union and the International Community to condemn police abuse and to ask the Colombian Government to stop the use of Armed Forces against protesters. We also insist on President Ivan Duque to condemn the police brutality and make accountable those members of the public forces who have abused their authority and committed human rights violations against civilians.

IPB reminds that peaceful assembly is a fundamental human right recognized by different International legal instruments necessary to the maintenance and respect of democracy. We would like to highlight that according to the UN General Comment No. 37 (2020) on the right of peaceful assembly (article 21) States have the obligation to *“allow peaceful assemblies to take place without unwarranted interference and to facilitate the exercise of the right, and to protect the participants”*. The disproportional response from the public forces in Colombia is a clear violation of the right to protest and threatens the life, dignity, and integrity of the people. This situation must be urgently addressed by the Colombian Government.

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Finally, we would like to express our solidarity with the Colombian people. We especially express our grief for the mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons who have lost family members in this wave of violence. We condemn these terrible acts and we urge the Colombian Government to offer guarantees to civil society to start a dialogue in order to ensure the respect of fundamental human rights.

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