
Colombian Cartel Kills Woman Community Leader, Son Witnesses

23/06/2019



Over 650 rural social leaders in Colombia have been killed since the peace accords went into effect in 2016 for protecting their land against illegal takeovers.

Colombian land rights leader, Maria del Pilar Hurtado, was murdered outside her home in the town of Tierralta Friday morning, a crime that occurred just days after her name appeared in a pamphlet circulated by [the far-right paramilitary Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces \(AGC\)](#), a part of the country's most powerful drug cartel, Clan Golfo.

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Hurtado's murder was witnessed by her 9-year-old son.

Andres Chica, director of Cordobexia Foundation, told local media that the AGC pamphlet accused Hurtado and six other people of "invading" lands belonging to the father of the Tierralta mayor, Fabio Otero. Among the others on the list were two community leaders previously assassinated, and the president of Cordobexia Foundation, Albeiro Begambre, who left the area for fear of being killed.

"What happens is that we have a territorial control dispute. The criminal structures operating in the area want to take over the lands for illegal mining or drug trafficking," Chica explained. The human rights organization leader added: "Since 2016, (Cordobexia) has reported the murder of 31 social leaders in the (Cordoba) Department, 12 of whom were from Tierralta. The insecurity

we live with is worrisome,"

According to United Nations, some 4,780 hectares of coca leaf are currently planted in the southern part of the department where 243 families have been forced to leave their homes due to the violence spread by right-wing paramilitary groups kicking people off their fertile lands.

"We don't beat around the bush. We are killing and regaining control and if we want a town to heat up, it heats up," the ACG pamphlet threatened.

Colombia's top prosecutor's office said in a January report that there were 431 reported assassinations of Indigenous and Campesino community leaders trying to maintain political power and control of land in their rural regions between Jan. 1, 2016 and Dec. 31, 2018. Human rights organization, Justice for Colombia, put that number at 670 between 2016 and June 2019.

According to state prosecurot Nestor Humberto Martinez, the assassinations are "passively systematic" and that the national government is doing little to bring the murders to justice. The attorney told reporters last January that those responsible are paramilitary groups "such as the 'Gulf Clan' that works on behalf of narco traffickers and 'Los Caparrapos' (drug cartel)."

The Center for Political and Sociocultural Studies of the Caribbean (CEPSCA) reported that in January alone, at least 41 people were killed violently in Cordoba, a territory disputed by the two major narco rings.

As violence continue to increase in Colombia's rural areas, [President Ivan Duque's administration](#), which delayed the implementation of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), has not been able to put an end to the murders of social activists.
