



Institute for Policy Studies

Ideas into Action

Executive Director

Tope Folarin

Gustavo Francisco Petro Urrego
President of Colombia

Board of Trustees

Kelly Johana Rocha Gómez
Viceminister of Mines

Board Chair
Sarita Gupta

María Susana Muhamad González
Minister of the Environment and Sustainable Development

Juan Fernando Cristo
Minister of the Interior

Sulma Arias
Harry Belafonte

Robert L. Borosage

María Milena Méndez Moreno
Specialized Director against Human Rights Violations
Attorney General's Office

John Cavanagh

James Early

Noura Erakat

Jodie Evans

Danny Glover

Katrina vanden Heuvel

Heidi Peltier

John Pomeranz

Augusto Rodríguez Ballesteros
Director, National Protection Unit (UNP)

Khury Petersen-Smith

Andy Shallal

Burke Stansbury

Lewis Steel

Elizabeth Williams
Ambassador of Canada in Colombia

CC:
Juvenal Díaz Mateus
Governor of Santander

In Memoriam

Richard Barnett

(1929 - 2004)

Elsbeth Bothe

(1927 - 2013)

Barbara Ehrenreich

(1941 - 2022)

Saul Landau

(1936 - 2013)

Marcus Raskin

(1934 - 2017)

Danilo Valbuena Pabón
Mayor of California, Santander

Lauren Conway
Senior Advisor for Trade Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia
Global Affairs Canada

December 23, 2024

Dear esteemed authorities,

The below signed international organizations and regional networks write with deep concern about the stigmatization campaign against members of the Committee for

the Defense of Water and the Santurban Páramo (the Santurbán Committee). The stigmatization campaign supports the interests of the Canadian mining company Aris Mining and Sociedad Minera de Santander S.A.S. (Minesa) of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and their Soto Norte project.

We denounce that, since at least December 4 of this year, a pamphlet has been circulating that states that as of December 9, that outsiders to the province and region will be prohibited entry. The pamphlet specifically names two people from the Santurbán Committee referring to them as *personae non gratae* and accuses them of wanting to take possession of the gold of the province of Soto Norte by force. It is a clear message that prohibits them from entering the Soto Norte province and which attempts to link them to illegal extraction. These types of threats are not new in the context of the Committee's long struggle and much less in the Colombian context, given that Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world to defend water, environment and territory, according to the latest Global Witness report.

The pamphlet is signed by the "Soto Norte Resistance Committee" and has been distributed by representatives of Calimineros, a company subcontracted by Aris and Minesa, along with some current and former representatives of the Municipality of California who defend the transnational companies' project. In 2021, this group published pamphlets where the Santurbán Committee was accused of being "enemies of progress in Santander" and responsible for "the detriment to the country's patrimony" due to an ICSID arbitration award, in which the State of Colombia was condemned for not complying with the fair and equitable treatment clause, in favor of the Canadian mining company Eco Oro Minerals.

It is important to note that this threat comes after the great march for the defense of water and the Santurbán held in the city of Bucaramanga on October 18 with the participation of more than 20,000 people who took to the streets to demand that clean water be prioritized over the economic interests of transnational mining companies. It also comes after the public and media attention received by Mayerly Lopez Carreño and Hernan Alberto Morantes, environmental and human rights defenders and members of the Santurbán Committee, because of their support for the draft resolution that declares the western massif of Santurbán as a temporary reserve, which was put in place following the public consultation by the Ministry of the Environment at the beginning of December. This threat also follows the denouncements regarding the links between the Governor of Santander, Juvenal Díaz

Mateus, and Aris Mining after he spoke out publicly against the resolution and stepped in as interlocutor with the federal government for the road blockades in Soto Norte that were organized in opposition to the resolution by the same local people who support Aris Mining-Minesa and who distributed the pamphlet.

The Santurbán Committee is a broad coalition of more than 40 organizations that have joined together to exercise their civic rights and joyfully defend the páramo, and the forests and rivers of Santurbán, a source of life essential to the clean water supply of more than three million people in Santander and Colombia.

Therefore, we urge the following state and international entities to:

TO THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT:

- Adopt the Escazú Agreement’s protection route for environmental defenders for the Santurbán Committee, as a collective, and for its members Mayerly Lopez and Hernan Morantes.
- Urgently adopt measures that guarantee the integral conservation of water and the Santurbán, prioritizing the participation and protection of the members of the Committee for the Defense of Water and the Santurbán Paramo as an organization that has been defending human rights and the environment for more than 15 years.
- Initiate sanctions through the Ministry of the Environment against the company Aris Mining-Minesa, guaranteeing full reparation for any contamination and environmental harms.

TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE OF THE NATION:

- Adopt the Escazú Agreement’s protection route for environmental defenders and initiate investigations to identify, prosecute and dismantle the intellectual authors of these threats.

TO THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE NATION

- Conduct a disciplinary investigation of the Secretary of the Government of California, Santander, Gerardo García, for his participation in these acts of

stigmatization, criminalization and threats against the members of the Santurbán Committee, who are environmental and human rights defenders.

TO THE NATIONAL PROTECTION UNIT

- Adopt collective and individual protection measures for the members of the Santurbán Committee.

TO THE DEPARTMENTAL GOVERNMENT OF SANTANDER:

- Comply with the Escazú Agreement and cease threats and harassment against environmental defenders and the Santurbán Committee.
- Comply with the State Council's ruling ordering the adoption of environmental reserve areas as part of a mining-environmental reorganization in Colombia.
- Comply with obligations under Law 99 of 1993 to facilitate the implementation of the Temporary Reserve Area of the Western Massif of Santurbán, in compliance with the Escazú Agreement, facilitating the participation of the Committee for the Defense of Water and the Santurbán Paramo as an environmental defense organization.

TO THE MUNICIPAL MAYOR'S OFFICE OF CALIFORNIA, SANTANDER:

- Guarantee and respect the work of the Santurbán Committee, and urge public officials not to participate in actions that stigmatize, criminalize or affect the rights of the members of this environmental organization.

EMBASSY OF CANADA IN COLOMBIA:

- As members of the Committee for the Defense of Water and the Páramo Santurbán, Mayerly Lopez Carreño and Hernan Alberto Morantes are human rights and environmental defenders. Peacefully, they carry out the very important work of defending the human rights of the Santurbán Páramos community members against the negative impacts of the Canadian mining company Aris Mining. The content of the bulletins circulated by the "Soto

Norte Committee" is defamatory and false and presents a great risk to the physical safety of these human rights and environmental defenders. We request the implementation of *Voices at Risk: Canada's Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders* to take the necessary measures for their protection, as well as for the protection of the collective, the Committee for the Defense of Water and the Páramo Santurbán.

SIGNED

Centre internationale de solidarité ouvrière (CISO)

Colectivo de Abogados y Abogadas José Alvear Restrepo (CAJAR)

Common Frontiers

IPS - Global Economy Program

Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA)

Latin America and the Caribbean Better without FTAs

London Mining Network

MiningWatch Canada

Transnational Institute (TNI)