

Statement by the Colombia section in response to attacks against social protest

May 2021

“This statement was approved by the membership of the Colombia section of the Latin American Studies Association. Approval of this statement was made by a vote of the Colombia section of 60 of the 107 people eligible in the section to vote. This is not a policy statement of the Latin American Studies Association, which neither endorses nor rejects the statements expressed”.

Colombia is experiencing a moment of social unrest unlike any other in recent decades. The unease caused by the tax reform bill proposed by the government of Iván Duque triggered a tidal wave of protests that have brought to light a widespread social, economic, and institutional crisis. After fifteen days of protests, violence of all kinds has been unleashed against the protestors, leaving to date more than 47 casualties, 548 missing and hundreds injured nationwide.

The Colombian scholars affiliated with the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), Colombia section, wish to condemn the abuses of all kinds that the Colombian Armed Forces and Police, as shock forces of the government, have committed against the people of the country. As scholars of Colombia, deeply interested in the country, we view with great concern the lack of a serious dialogue from the government, offering real options to change the situation of millions of impoverished Colombians and to allow opportunities to address the justified demands of urban youth, students, indigenous people, workers, Afro-descendants, and other popular sectors.

Over the past few days, colleagues from universities abroad studying Colombia, professors, and students at various universities in the country, as well as several international organizations, have expressed through several statements their deep concern about the current crisis and the violence against those exercising their right to protest. In addition, they have rejected and called for the clarification of responsibilities for the increasing number of people who have been killed, who have disappeared, and who have been sexually assaulted; this violence has particularly been directed against young people and indigenous people.

The Colombians affiliated with the LASA, the largest association of scholars in the world who study our region, want to attract the attention of the new government of the United States, home country of our association and crucial element in the recent history of Colombia, to promote in a peaceful and effective way a broad dialogue, with real solutions for the protesters, while stimulating within the Colombian government a structural review of its public force, an institution that should be trained for peace and not for war. Furthermore, we join the demand by multiple human rights organizations to the U.S. government to desist from any type of assistance, training, or sale of weapons, equipment, and military services to the Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron (ESMAD) and other military forces in

Colombia. Instead, it is necessary to join institutional efforts in Colombia and internationally to ensure that the government of Iván Duque fully and faithfully implements the peace treaties.

As other scholars have done within and outside Colombia, we offer our good services to nurture the dialogue between the parties and reach productive agreements and peaceful solutions for the country.

Signed:

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