

LASA expresses its concern over state's repression of the Colombian student movement

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The Executive Committee of the Latin American Studies Association expresses its concern over the repression with which the Colombian government has responded to massive, peaceful student demonstrations throughout the country in defense of the public universities. As the largest professional association in the world that brings together individuals and institutions dedicated to the study of Latin America, LASA promotes research and teaching about Latin America, the Caribbean and its peoples, and defends academic liberty and respect for human rights.

Since October 11, students of 32 public universities and technical institutions in Colombia began a strike to demand adequate financing of higher education in the country. Their claims sought to prevent the privatization of public education, as a guaranty of the universal right to education. Over more than six weeks of striking, different massive, peaceful demonstrations have been carried out in all cities in the country.

In response to the demonstrations, the Colombian government convened a meeting with the rectors of the public universities, offering them support representing only twenty percent of what had been demanded, which they accepted. Then, the government called the student and professorial representatives, but only called on them to end the strike. As a result, the student demonstration continued, and the government responded with repression. In effect, the week of November 8, the special police anti-mutiny forces attacked the peaceful demonstrations in Medellin, Pamplona, Popayan, Monteria and Bogota. Numerous were wounded and arrested. At the same time, there were reports of threats of violent evacuation of the students camping out on various campuses throughout the country.

The LASA Executive Committee condemns these violent state actions that attempt to silence the political voice of a massive and peaceful demonstration. Likewise, it calls on the national government to pursue the dialogue reestablished on November 18 to place on the table possible short, medium and long term solutions to the increasing defunding of the public universities. Finally, it asks the municipal authorities and police forces to respect the right to protest and to cease using violence that hinders the discussion of measures that could resolve the problem of the lack of resources for public university education.

About LASA

The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) is the largest professional association in the world that brings together individuals and institutions dedicated to the study of Latin America. Currently, LASA has more than 12,000 members worldwide and has a section specialized in Colombian matters.

If you wish to interview a LASA Executive Council member, you can contact the LASA communications office at (412) 648-7929 or lasa@lasaweb.org.

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