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DBI COLOMBIA PRESENTS



Luis Carlos Pérez
Lawyers' Collective (CCALCP)

Photo: Charlotte Kesl

Peace Brigades International (PBI) has accompanied the Luís Carlos Pérez Lawyers' Collective (CCALCP) since 2006.



Judith Maldonado (CCALCP), Olga Quintero (ASCAMCAT) and Ana Vicente (PBI).
Photo: Charlotte Kesl

The Luís Carlos Pérez Lawyers' Collective is a non-profit organisation with the objective of bringing law closer to communities and grassroots groups so that it is relevant to those populations' social, cultural, and political realities¹. According to CCALCP, their aim is also to encourage the development of a pluralist, tolerant and democratic society which respects human rights and international humanitarian law.

CCALCP is comprised of human rights defenders who accompany and provide legal consultation to victims of human rights violations in the regions of the Magdalena Medio and Catatumbo. The organisation also accompanies the Environmental Oversight Civilian Committees of several municipalities in the departments of Santander and Norte de Santander. Additionally, CCALCP accompanies communities and grassroots organising processes in their comprehensive

defence of and demand for human rights; the search for truth, justice, comprehensive reparation and guarantees that their rights will not be violated in the future; the defence and protection of biodiversity against mining interests and the present economic model; and the defence of the right to land, territory and self-determination.

CCALCP FOCUSES ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES:

- Popular education: Implementation and development of an education programme on politics, human rights, and international humanitarian law.
- Prevention of impunity: Legal counsel and accompaniment, including preparing reports for United Nations Special Rapporteurs.
- Human rights and international humanitarian

CCALCP IS COMPRISED OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS WHO ACCOMPANY AND PROVIDE LEGAL CONSULTATION TO VICTIMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

law: Raising awareness of the problems affecting the region and the social sectors accompanied by CCALCP.

→ Defence of biodiversity and collective and environmental rights.

→ Strengthening grassroots organising processes in Santander and Norte de Santander with indigenous people, traditional small farmers, and victims of human rights violations.

In Norte de Santander, CCALCP accompanies victims of forced displacement (such as the Association of Displaced People from the Province of Ocaña – ASODEPO), the Coalition to Strengthen Displaced People’s Organisations from Norte de Santander,

the Motilón Barí indigenous people, the Association of Small Farmers of Catatumbo (ASCAMCAT), and traditional farming communities from the municipality of Toledo. In the Magdalena Medio, its work has focused on two areas: legal aid (lawsuits and legal defence) and political advocacy. CCALCP also works with the Peasant Farmers’ Association of the Cimitarra River Valley (ACVC) and the Magdalena Medio Association of Victims of State Crimes (ASORVIM). In Southern Bolívar, CCALCP accompanies the First Political Education School, a project to defend land rights, carried out by the Guamocó Association of Agro-Ecological and Mining Partnerships (AHERAMIGUA).



Judith Maldonado (CCALCP) wearing a t-shirt with the slogan for the campaign: “Freedom for Catatumbo. No more baseless criminal investigations”. Photo: Charlotte Kesl



Ana Vicente and Carly Bishop (PBI), Judith Maldonado (CCALCP).
Photo: Charlotte Kesl

CCALCP is a member of the Colombia-Europe-United States Coordination (CCEEU) and also participates in the Eduardo Umaña Mendoza Colombian Human Rights Lawyers' Association (ACADEUM) and the Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE).

History

In September 2001, the Luís Carlos Pérez Lawyers' Collective was established in the city of Bucaramanga to accompany social, labour and grassroots organisations, and internally displaced and vulnerable communities in the region. According to CCALCP, the organisation was founded for two fundamental reasons:

→ The region did not have an organisation specialising in providing social, grassroots, labour and internally displaced populations with legal accompaniment and counsel carried out from a humanist perspective, which was in addition fully

dedicated to the defence and protection of human rights.

→ When the organisation was established there was a grave humanitarian crisis in the regions of North-Eastern Colombia and the Magdalena Medio—a crisis that CCALCP believes is even more serious today. In fact, the political, social and armed conflict affecting the population in these areas has led to these regions reporting some of the worst statistics on forced displacement in Colombia. Every year, thousands of families are forcibly displaced from the Magdalena Medio and the region of Catatumbo to nearby cities such as Barrancabermeja, Bucaramanga, Cúcuta, and Ocaña². In addition to the internally displaced population, CCALCP also provides assistance and counsel to communities resisting displacement in the midst of the political, social and armed conflict.

According to CCALCP, it should also be taken into account that «a process to persecute, criminalise and



Traditional farmers from Catatumbo at the Humanitarian Refuge.
Photo: Charlotte Kesl

criminally investigate grassroots, labour and displaced peoples' organisations has been implemented in this region. This situation has affected all forms of social protest and brought about massive human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law by different armed actors»³.

On 12 March 2010 the organisation's director, Judith Maldonado, reportedly received a death threat on her mobile telephone voicemail from a caller who identified himself as a member of the «Black Eagles» illegal armed group⁴. CCALCP reported this incident to Colombian authorities since it represents a clear threat to her physical safety. CCALCP has also reported eight other incidents, including illegal communications interceptions and violations, the theft of computer equipment, and false accusations and testimony⁵.

Protection measures

CCALCP members do not have protection measures from the Colombia State or international bodies. In this respect, one of the principal protection measures for CCALCP has been the accompaniment provided by Peace Brigades International.

Current work

After 68 arrest warrants were issued against members of social and farmer organisations from Catatumbo –twenty of whom were eventually detained–⁶, CCALCP led a Verification Commission on these mass detentions carried out in the area. The commission gathered information on all of the human rights and international humanitarian law violations, which were then systematised and analysed for greater understanding. CCALCP provides legal representation for several of those detained, including José del Carmen Abril, president of the Association of Small

Farmers of Catatumbo (ASCAMCAT), and Jonny Abril Salcedo, ASCAMCAT leader and coordinator of the Humanitarian Refuge⁷.

CCALCP provides ASCAMCAT with accompaniment, counsel and training on organising and legal issues, specifically for the Humanitarian Refuge (located in Caño Tomás, a rural community of the municipality of Teorama, Norte de Santander). On 29 April 2009, the Refuge was established to bring attention to human rights violations in the area. Since then, nearly 300 people have come to the refuge, returning to Catatumbo after being displaced by the armed conflict.

CCALCP also supports and accompanies the Motilón Barí indigenous community, located in the Catatumbo Forest Reserve. The Colombian military has pushed the armed insurgency into the community's territory and the effects of drug trafficking on the environment have worsened. In order to exploit these vast untouched deposits, companies and individuals with interest

in coal exploration have exerted intense pressure to redraw the borders of the Motilón Barí's forest reserve approved by the Colombian government in 1951⁸. As part of their work, CCALCP carries out verification commissions to the indigenous community. The organisation also provides training workshops and legal advice and reports human rights abuses to different bodies. A significant result of this work is the Constitutional Court Ruling T-880 of 2006 to protect the community's rights⁹.

Published information¹⁰

→ «Informe Comisión de Verificación extraordinaria en el Catatumbo». Prepared by CCALCP with support from other social organisations in March 2010.

→ «Informe de la situación de derechos humanos del Pueblo Indígena Motilón Bari». Report presented to James Anaya, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, within the framework



Carly Bishop (PBI) leaving the Humanitarian Refuge. Photo: Charlotte Kesl

of his visit to Colombia in 2009. The report was prepared by the Motilón Barí Indigenous Communities Association (ASOCBARI) with support from CCALCP in July 2009.

→ «Informe de seguimiento de la lucha contra la impunidad y negación de los derechos de las víctimas de los crímenes de lesa humanidad de Ejecuciones Extrajudiciales en Norte de Santander». Report presented to Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary and Arbitrary Executions, within the framework of his visit to Colombia in 2009. Prepared by CCALCP in June 2009.

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1. <http://www.colectivodeabogadosluiscarlosperez.org>
2. Number of displaced people per receiving municipality in 2009: 4,779 in Barrancabermeja, Santander; 3,556 in Cúcuta, Norte de Santander; and 3,397 in Bucaramanga, Santander. Source: CODHES Informa, Boletín Informativo No. 76, 27 January 2010
3. «Informe Comisión de Verificación Extraordinaria en el Catatumbo», CCALCP, March 2010
4. «Amenazas contra el Colectivo de Abogados Luis Carlos Pérez», Prensa Rural, 13 March 2010
5. «Denuncia Pública», CCALCP, 28 April 2009
6. «Mass Detentions in Catatumbo», ColomPBIa, PBI Colombia, April 2010
7. «Informe Comisión de Verificación Extraordinaria en el Catatumbo», CCALCP, March 2010
8. «Tensión en los fronteras – Un análisis sobre el conflicto armado, el desplazamiento forzado y el refugio en las fronteras de Colombia con Ecuador, Panamá y Venezuela», CODHES, July 2009
9. In 2005, the Ministry of Environment, Housing and Territorial Development granted an environmental licence to ECOPETROL to carry out exploratory perforations at the Alamo 1 Well in indigenous territory in the municipality of Tibú (Norte de Santander). Due to the absence of a genuine preliminary consultation, the Motilón Barí community filed a legal action to protect their rights, demanding to be able to participate in the decisions affecting their community. In Ruling T-880 of 2006, the Constitutional Court ordered ECOPETROL to suspend exploration activities at the Alamo 1 Well.
10. The following list only includes some of the most recent reports. For further information: <http://www.colectivodeabogadosluiscarlosperez.org>



Delegation of traditional farmers from Catatumbo traveling on the Catatumbo River.
Photo: Charlotte Kesl