



NHCSL

THE NATIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS OF STATE LEGISLATORS

EMERGENCY RESOLUTION No. 2021-05

End State-Sponsored Violence Against Colombian Protestors and Help Colombia Strengthen its Civil Society and Safety Net

Reported to the Caucus by the NHCSL Human and Civil Rights Task Force
Rep. Jessica González (TX), Chair

Sponsored by: Sen. Patricia Torres-Ray (MN)

Unanimously approved by the NHCSL Executive Committee on behalf of the entire
Caucus on June 10, 2021

WHEREAS, around a million political protestors¹ have taken to the streets in Colombia in ongoing demonstrations starting in late April;² and,

WHEREAS, the protests erupted “in response to a tax proposal by the government of President Iván Duque and turned markedly more violent on [May 3rd], with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights denouncing the national police for ‘opening fire’ on demonstrators in Colombia’s third-biggest city;”³ and,

WHEREAS, we do not express an opinion on the details of the policy leading to the dispute because they are irrelevant to the human rights of the Colombian people to

¹ Colombia has a population of around 51 million.

² Sarah Cahlan, et al, *Killed by police in Colombia* (The Washington Post, May 20, 2021), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2021/colombia-protests-deaths-police/>

³ Steven Grattan and Anthony Faiola, *Violence in Colombia protests escalates amid allegations of police excess* (The Washington Post, May 4, 2021), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/04/colombia-protests-cali-police/>

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freely express themselves, to protest peacefully, to organize, to demand accountability, and to enjoy freedom of the press; and,

WHEREAS, independent analysis shows that police using excessive force have killed at least 14 civilians in the protests, dozens have died in total, including one police officer,⁴ due in part to indiscriminate gunfire against the crowds as human rights observers have denounced;⁵ and,

WHEREAS, according to Human Rights Watch, even before the protests erupted, Colombia had had the highest number of human rights defenders killed since 2016 in any country in Latin America, due, in large part, to the failure of the government to “strengthen the justice system and ensure adequate access to economic and educational opportunities and public services [thus] significantly limit[ing] government efforts to undermine armed groups’ power and prevent human rights abuses;”⁶ and,

WHEREAS, these failures by the government have led to a worsening of ethnic relations in Colombia and even to some baselessly claiming that indigenous protestors are using the protests “to vandalize... property and threaten [the] community;”⁷ and,

WHEREAS, as the Colombian government response to the protests turned violent in early May 2021, state legislators of Colombian descent from several states in the United States led many concerned state officials and concerned citizens in a letter to US officials calling for their intervention to stop the violence, including “an immediate Leahy vetting review [to] determine whether there is credible information that a recipient unit of the Colombian military or police has committed a gross human rights violation since the wave of violence began;” and,

WHEREAS, on May 14, 2021, US Representatives Jim McGovern, Mark Pocan, Jan Schakowsky and Raúl Grijalva led a group of “55 Members of Congress in expressing grave concern over the political & human rights situation in Colombia & urging the

⁴ Sarah Cahlan, et al, *Killed by police in Colombia* (The Washington Post, May 20, 2021), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2021/colombia-protests-deaths-police/>

⁵ Steven Grattan and Anthony Faiola, *Violence in Colombia protests escalates amid allegations of police excess* (The Washington Post, May 4, 2021), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/04/colombia-protests-cali-police/>

⁶ José Miguel Vivanco on behalf of Human Rights Watch, *Amicus brief on killings of human rights defenders in Colombia* (Colombian Constitutional Court, April 20, 2021) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/20/amicus-brief-killings-human-rights-defenders-colombia#>

⁷ Joe Perkin Daniels, *Colombia’s class war turns hot on the streets of Cali* (The Guardian, May 19, 2021) available at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/may/19/colombia-class-war-cali>

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U.S. Government to clearly & unambiguously denounce police brutality in Colombia” and to suspend military assistance and weapons sales.⁸

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators recognizes the leadership of the state legislators of Colombian descent and joins with them in calling for the United States Congress, the White House, the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the U.S. Department of Justice deliver a firm and urgent message to their Colombian counterparts that violence against peaceful protestors is inexcusable and runs counter to the very basic tenets of a functional democracy; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators calls on the Biden Administration to take all steps necessary to assist Colombia in the long term goal of strengthening access, fairness and effectiveness in their justice system and ensuring adequate access to economic and educational opportunities and public services for all people, especially the poor and indigenous, and reassert the values and human rights that we know we all have in common, including freedom of speech, assembly and peaceful protest, and respect for ethnic diversity.

AT THE REQUEST OF THE HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS TASK FORCE, AND PURSUANT TO THE IMMEDIATE NEEDS PROCESS OF THE NHCSL BYLAWS, THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE GAVE FINAL APPROVAL TO THIS RESOLUTION AT ITS VIRTUAL MEETING ON JUNE 10, 2021.

⁸ <https://twitter.com/RepMcGovern/status/1393381429241950210>