

24 October 2018

Colombia: Break-in at workplace and threats against Malena Martínez

On 19 October 2018, the workplace of woman human rights defender **Malena Mariet Martínez Montoya** in Sincelejo, Sucre, Colombia was broken into and ransacked. The office's lock was broken, but nothing was stolen and the police found a note threatening the human rights defender. Malena Mariet Martínez Montoya filed a formal complaint before the National Prosecutor's Office on 20 October 2018.

[Malena Mariet Martínez Montoya](#) is a member of the Sucre branch of the **Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado** (National Movement of Victims of State Crimes – MOVICE). MOVICE is a coalition of more than 200 human rights organisations which monitors human rights violations committed in the context of the armed conflict and calls for state agents and paramilitaries to be brought to justice. It promotes the rights of victims to truth, justice, and full reparation. Since its foundation in 2005, it has developed a presence in 15 departments of the country, including the department of Sucre.

In the afternoon of 19 October 2018, unknown individuals broke into Malena Mariet Martínez Montoya's workplace, a dental clinic. The locks were broken and the place was ransacked, but nothing was taken. Instead, a threatening note was left, which read "Malena, you see that we can get to you" (*Malena ya vez que podemos llegar hasta ti*), signed by AGC¹ *Fuera Guerrillas*. The police sent a forensic team which secured evidence of the break-in, including the threatening note. The human rights defender filed a formal complaint before the National Prosecutor's Office on 20 October 2018.

It is not the first time that Malena Mariet Martínez Montoya is being targeted. She was granted [precautionary measures](#) by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 2006, alongside [Juan David Díaz Chamorro](#), [Ingrid Vergara](#), and other members of MOVICE Sucre due to the multiple threats experienced by them. In June 2013, Malena Mariet Martínez Montoya, her husband and one other person linked to the family were informed of a plan to kill them. In 2018 alone, the defender received three threatening messages by phone, stating that she should stop accompanying victims of *La Guaripa* and that, if she does not comply, herself, her family and the victims would all be killed. Malena Martinez and other colleagues from MOVICE Sucre have been accompanying the *La Guaripa* case since January 2018, when three brothers were killed as a result of a land conflict.

This latest threat against Malena Mariet Martínez Montoya is part of a pattern of continued threats and intimidation aimed at members of MOVICE throughout the country. The organisation collected evidence of more than 130 serious threats and attacks against its members since its creation in 2006, including killings, attempted killings, break-ins, direct threats, threats to family members, as well as judicial harassment and prosecution, arrests and various forms of intimidation.

Colombia has seen an upsurge in the killing of human rights defenders since the peace agreement was signed in December 2016. Despite the [Presidential Decree 2252](#) from 29 December 2017, which establishes obligations of local and regional governments to protect and implement security measures for human rights defenders, community and social leaders at risk, social leaders in rural areas of the country face continued targeted violence against them. According to reports of the Colombian organisation [Somos Defensores](#), between January and June of 2018 272 threats, 77 killings, 23 attempted murders and four disappearances of human rights defenders were registered. As in previous years, the defenders most affected by the violence were community,

¹AGC: *Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia* is one of the largest paramilitary groups in Colombia.

campesino and indigenous leaders in rural areas, with a growing proportion in urban areas. Alleged perpetrators in most cases were paramilitary groups.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the break-in and threats against Malena Martínez. Front Line Defenders believes these attacks to be directly linked to the legitimate and peaceful work of Malena Martínez in the defence of the rights of victims of Colombia's armed conflict.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Colombia to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the break-in at the workplace of woman human rights defender Malena Martínez and the threats made against her, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Malena Martínez and her family, in coordination and agreement with her;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of MOVICE members, in Sucre and other departments, in coordination and agreement of its members;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Colombia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 12 (2): *"The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration."*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.



Andrew Anderson
Executive Director