

Professor Juan Carlos Orozco Cruz  
Vice Chancellor of the National Pedagogic University of Colombia  
Bogotá,  
Colombia

12<sup>th</sup> December 2012

Dear Professor Cruz

I am writing, on behalf of UCU, the British university and college union, to express our concern about the case of Dr. Renán Vega Cantor. Dr. Vega is a lecturer at the National Pedagogic University of Colombia and is the Vice President of the University's branch of ASPU, the Colombian University Professors' Association, our sister trade union in Colombia and affiliate of Education International, the international union federation representing over 30 million educators worldwide. As a fellow academic and member of a sister union, we are particularly concerned for his well-being.

We understand that Dr. Vega was forced to flee Colombia in August this year, as a result of false accusations and a series of threats against him. For example, in July, Dr. Vega was named as a "military target", along with several other academics and students at your university, in a threat which claimed to come from a re-armed paramilitary group. The threat also targeted Dr. Vega specifically; "*Professor Renan Vega Cantor we already know where you live and how to take you down LEAVE THE UPN [National Pedagogic University] this is your ultimatum.*" This raises severe concerns for Mr. Vega's safety.

Following these threats that forced Dr. Vega to flee Colombia, he has been carrying out a research commission for your university, allowing him to continue his academic work. However, the commission has now expired. We are concerned that if Dr. Vega does not receive an extension of the commission, he will be forced to return to Colombia where his life will be in grave danger, or risk being cut off from his research.

We know Dr. Vega to be a prolific academic, who has made important contributions to critical thought. Indeed, in 2008 he was awarded the "Liberator of Critical Thought Prize" by Venezuela, to celebrate his work.

We are also aware of ongoing persecution against the Colombian university community, particularly those like Dr. Vega, whose work questions government policies – an essential part of any democracy. Indeed, on 20<sup>th</sup> November, eight members of the University of Magdalena received death threats attempting to expel them from the university. That same day, 68 year old Colombian academic Olga Cadena Corrales was assassinated in Alejandria, Armenia and on 24<sup>th</sup> November, Carlos Andrés Ospina, sociologist at the Technological University of Pereira, was imprisoned alongside seven other members of the Patriotic March opposition movement, on what appears to be political motivations. On 29<sup>th</sup> November, Adolfo Atehortúa, deacon of the Humanities Faculty at the National Pedagogic University, received a death threat from the paramilitary group Aguilas Negras. This latest threat also named Renan Vega, and advised that Dr. Atehortua "followed his steps" in leaving the country.

Given the danger facing the university community, we are concerned that there can be no guarantees for Dr. Vega's safety in Colombia. We urge you to grant an extension of his research commission, in order to safeguard his life.

We urge you to do all in your power to defend academic freedom and ensure that Dr. Vega and others like him at your university are able to continue their work in safety.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sally Hunt", with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Sally Hunt  
General Secretary

cc: Colombian Ombudsperson Office (Defensoría del Pueblo)  
Mr. Jorge Enrique Calero, Ombudsperson for the Prevention of Risks of Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law  
Dr. Renán Vega