



University and College Union

Sally Hunt General secretary

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3 October 2013

Dr Ignacio Mantilla
Universidad Nacional de Colombia
Carrera 45 N° 26-85
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COLOMBIA

Dear Dr Ignacio Mantilla

I am writing on behalf of the British organisation, the University and College Union, representing more than 117,000 university teachers and education professionals across the United Kingdom, in relation to the case of Dr. Miguel Ángel Beltrán, professor of sociology at the National University of Colombia, to express our serious concerns about the recent decision by the Procuraduría General de la Nación to bar Dr. Beltrán from employment as a public servant for 13 years.

For a number of reasons academics in the UK have been very concerned about the external disciplinary proceedings against Dr Beltrán. First, the Procuraduría's case was based on the same evidence that was already disproved during Dr Beltrán's legal process.

Second, the actions by the Procuraduría violate the 1992 ruling of the Constitutional Court on university autonomy. This law is based on the need for all forms of academic research and teaching to take place in a climate free of government interference. Furthermore, in 2002 the court ruled on the constitutionality of section 30 of the 1992 Act which established the right of public universities to have their own disciplinary system for academic and administrative staff.

To the outside world the Procuraduría's case appears to be another politically-motivated attempt to silence Dr. Beltrán's work as a university teacher. Academics in the UK are very concerned that the National University of Colombia has failed to challenge this outrageous attack on its own institutional autonomy and on the academic freedom of one of its employees.

On behalf of the 117,000 members of the University and College Union I call on you first, to defend the principle of university autonomy and not legitimise the arbitrary decision made by the Procuraduría to prohibit Dr. Beltrán from serving at the University and second, to defend the right to the freedom of thought and the freedom to teach and to ensure that those involved with researching themes related to the armed and social conflict are free to do so without persecution.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Sally Hunt
General Secretary