

13 January 2014

Sr Eduardo Montealegre Lynett
Fiscal General de la Nació
Diagonal 22-B # 52-01
Bogotá
COLOMBIA

Dear Mr Montealegre

I am writing on behalf of the University and College Union (UCU) which represents over 115,000 academics and education professionals across the UK.

We were shocked to hear of the recent arrest on 4 January 2014 of Francisco Toloza in the city of Cúcuta. Francisco Toloza is an internationally respected academic and Head of International Relations for the Patriotic March. After his arrest he was charged with "aggravated rebellion". We reject this arrest and are concerned that Francisco Toloza is being persecuted for his critical academic research focused on the Colombian conflict and for his position within the Patriotic March.

It is extremely worrying that the arrest of Francisco Toloza, which comes after the arrest in May of the Patriotic March's National Organiser, Huber Ballesteros, is accompanied by repeated physical attacks against members of the organisation. We are extremely concerned at what appears to be a two tiered strategy with the involvement of state authorities to both legally and physically persecute the Patriotic March. In 2013, at least 25 members of the Patriotic March were killed and in not a single case has anyone been brought to justice.

As academics we value highly the importance of the right to freedom of thought and political debate and we are sure that you will also value this as an essential element to any democratic society and that you will agree that its upholding is of particular importance at the moment in Colombia as it enters a crucial stage in terms of ending the decades long civil war. We ask you as such to ensure the immediate release of both Francisco Toloza and Huber Ballesteros and to guarantee that all academics and all members of the Patriotic March enjoy all the legal guarantees as provided to them by the Colombian Constitution.

I would be extremely grateful if you could inform me of the latest developments in this case.

Yours sincerely

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

Sally Hunt
General Secretary

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