

Joe Westby
Researcher & Operations Officer
Business & Human Rights Resource Centre
1-3 Charlotte Street
3rd floor
London
W1T 1RD

16 June 2009

Dear Mr Westby

ABColumbia¹ was extremely concerned upon reading a letter posted on your website from the Muriel Mining Corporation². The letter includes both false and inaccurate information regarding the work of one of ABColumbia's partner organisations, the Colombian non-governmental organisation Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace (Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz - CIJP) and the international non-governmental organisation Peace Brigades International (PBI). These two organisations were the subject of insinuations apparently made by the Muriel Mining Corporation, implying links with illegal armed actors in Colombia. CIJP is a partner organisation of Christian Aid while PBI participates as an international observer organisation in the ABColumbia platform.

PBI is a highly respected and well-known international organisation that has received international awards for the work that it undertakes in protecting and promoting human rights. In fact it carries out protective accompaniment in five countries in Latin America and Asia through international accompaniment of members of civil society. The organisation has provided protective accompaniment to human rights defenders and displaced communities in Colombia since 1994. Throughout this time, PBI has observed its guiding principles of impartiality and non-interference in situations of conflict. Contrary to the insinuations made, PBI does not communicate with illegal armed actors. Furthermore, in order to responsibly operate in areas of conflict, PBI is in constant communication with military, police, and civilian authorities to assess risks and inform of their whereabouts.

CIJP is one of 14 non-governmental organisations currently accompanied by PBI in Colombia. CIJP provides legal representation and training to communities in order to minimize possible violations of human rights in different regions throughout Colombia

¹ ABColumbia brings together CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam GB, SCIAF, and Trócaire, in a unique coalition of agencies with a long trajectory of work in Colombia. Peace Brigades International and Amnesty International have observer status.

² Letter dated 16 May 2009

at the request of local communities. The Muriel Mining Company is entitled to disagree with the work carried out by CIJP, but should refrain from casting doubt upon the legitimacy of the organisation's work. It is also important to note that members of CIJP are beneficiaries of cautionary measures granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights due to threats, aggressions, and intimidation they have suffered as a result of their work in defence of human rights and in this context, we express deep concern for any statement which could further compromise their security.

ABColumbia rejects both insinuations and defamations given the apparent aim to stigmatise PBI and the CIJP despite their legal and legitimate work. Such defamation is particularly worrying as it can seriously affect the security of both organisations and their personnel in the field. We also view such statements as part of a continuing pattern of stigmatisation of civil society organisations in Colombia, which in many cases are working in an environment where other interests may jeopardise the welfare of local communities.

ABColumbia

Sally O' Neill

Latin America Regional Manager, TRÓCAIRE

Francis McDonagh

Programme Manager Andes Region, CAFOD

Jonathan Glennie

Country Representative Colombia, CHRISTIAN AID (UK and Ireland)

David Huey

Country Director Colombia, OXFAM GB

Chris MacLulich

Latin America Projects Officer, SCIAF