

22 March 2018

## Colombia: Killing of two sons of human rights defender Bernardo Cuero

On 19 March 2018, **Silvio Duban Ortiz Ortiz** and **Javier Bernardo Cuero Ortiz**, sons of human rights defender, **Bernardo Cuero Bravo**, were killed by unknown individuals in Barrio Independencia Ferrocarril Avenue of Tumaco Municipality, Nariño.

On 7 June 2017, their father [Bernardo Cuero Bravo](#) was killed at his home in Malambo, Atlántico province. He was shot four times in front of his wife and died instantly.

Bernardo Cuero Bravo was president of the Junta de Acción of Atlántico province and was also a member of the **Asociación Nacional de Afrocolombianos Desplazados (AFRODES)**, a human rights organisation that offers support and training to members of the Afrocolombian community who have been displaced because of the conflict in the region. The organisation also works to support the self-determination and cultural rights of the Afrocolombian community. Bernardo Cuero Bravo was also a member of the Mesa de Víctimas de Malambo y del Atlántico, a working group established by the government's Victims' Unit, which works to develop strategies to better represent and support victims of the armed conflict during the Transitional Justice Process in Colombia.

On 19 March 2018, thirteen days after the public hearing of the criminal procedure on Bernardo Cuero's assassination in Barranquilla, his sons Silvio Duban Ortiz Ortiz and Javier Bernardo Cuero Ortiz were shot and killed by unknown individuals in Barrio Independencia Ferrocarril Avenue of Tumaco Municipality, Nariño. Silvio Duban Ortiz Ortiz and Javier Bernardo Cuero Ortiz were on the premises of the family business with Javier's wife when two men in a motorcycle shot the brothers. Both died instantly from their wounds. Javier's wife was also injured in the incident, having been shot in her left shoulder.

On 6 March 2018, members of AFRODES, along with friends and family of Bernardo Cuero, attended the public hearing on his assassination and organised a protest to demand justice for the human rights defender. Silvio Duban Ortiz Ortiz and Javier Bernardo Cuero Ortiz also participated in this protest. According to AFRODES, the recent killings of Silvio Duban Ortiz Ortiz and Javier Bernardo Cuero Ortiz is evidence of the high risk of assassination facing community leaders and their families. AFRODES further reports the heightened risks facing their members and has lodged numerous complaints about threats against members in Cali, Cartagena, Bogotá and Soacha.

Several years prior to his assassination, Bernardo Cuero had survived an earlier attempt on his life. At that time his case was brought to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which instructed the Colombian State to provide protective measures for him and the other members of AFRODES. He was provided with a bullet proof jacket and a mobile phone but a year ago these were withdrawn. Given the frequent threats to which he was being subjected, Bernardo had repeatedly asked for protection from the state, but this was never provided.

Colombia has seen an upsurge in the killing of human rights defenders since the peace process was signed in December 2016. According to the **Somos Defensores** [report](#), there was a 32.5% increase in killings of human rights defenders in Colombia during 2017, which resulted in the deaths of 106 human rights defenders. 2018 seems likely to continue along these lines with 18 killings in January alone. In addition, the government continues to issue decrees that are not implemented, such as the [Presidential Decree 2252](#) from 29 December 2017, which establishes the 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 are facing another year of targeted violence that shows no sign of abating.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the killing of Silvio Duban Ortiz Ortiz and Javier Bernardo Cuero Ortiz, sons of human rights defender, Bernardo Cuero Bravo, as it believed that their assassination was linked with their father's work in defence of the rights of the Afrocolombian community and also their participation in a protest demanding justice for the killing of their father, Bernardo Cuero Bravo.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Colombia to:**

1. Strongly condemn the killings of Silvio Duban Ortiz Ortiz and Javier Bernardo Cuero Ortiz;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of the members of the family of Bernardo Cuero Bravo, Silvio Duban Ortiz Ortiz and Javier Bernardo Cuero Ortiz;
3. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the assassination of Silvio Duban Ortiz Ortiz and Javier Bernardo Cuero Ortiz, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
4. Implement Presidential Decree 2252 from 29 December 2017 and all other decrees related to the protection of human rights defenders in Colombia;
5. 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.