



INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF CIVIL LIBERTIES ORGANIZATIONS

INCLO condemns police violence in Colombia and calls for meaningful police reform

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Fourteen (14) member organizations of the **International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations (INCLO)** condemn the police repression of protests and the death of Javier Ordóñez in Bogota, Colombia on the night of 8-9 September at the hands of law enforcement. [The video](#) circulating on social media showed Ordóñez pinned to the ground by two police officers who shocked him repeatedly with a stun gun. Ordóñez, a father of two, died shortly afterward in police custody.

It is well established that the police response must always be non-discriminatory, lawful, proportionate, and necessary. The police must, at all times, seek to de-escalate the situation rather than inflame it by resorting to life-threatening weapons and disproportionate responses, as has been the case in Colombia.

In the wake of the September protest and the tragic events that left at least 10 others dead and more than 50 people injured by gunfire, **INCLO's** member organizations from across the world condemn the use of lethal ammunition and the misuse of 'less-lethal' weapons against protestors, a malpractice contravening the international standards on law enforcement in the context of protest.

In solidarity with **Dejusticia**, our member organization in Colombia, INCLO members call for accountability of the police force and reforms that address the issues related to police misconduct. The reform of the police institutions should include the elimination of the current military and police criminal jurisdiction, so that the conduct of its members will be judged by the ordinary justice system, given that the latter should be a civilian body.

INCLO members further call on the Colombian government to comply with the recent ruling^[1] of the *Supreme Court of Justice* in the country, which recognizes the systematic

violation of the rights associated with protest in Colombia and the need to ensure participation from the civil society in the process of drafting government protocols.

According to the ruling the government in Colombia must:

- (i) maintain neutrality in the face of peaceful assemblies, even if these have the purpose of questioning policies of the government itself;
- (ii) work, with the real participation of social organizations, on a protocol that regulates the use of force in peaceful assemblies based on current national and international standards;
- (iii) ensure that the Prosecutor's Office, the Attorney General's Office, and the Police issue a protocol to carry out verifications in cases of arrests and transfer of people;
- (iv) ensure that the Public Ministry designs easy-access plans for accompaniment and legal advice for people who, in acts of protests, are or have been affected.

While the use of lethal weapons during protests is unacceptable, the abusive use of less lethal weapons is also harmful to the health and lives of the protestors. To ensure the protection of human rights in the context of protests, the [UN Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement](#) must be incorporated in the practice of police institutions.^[2]

INCLO^[3] is a network of defenders of civil liberties around the world who call for stricter regulation on the use of less-lethal weapons at the national and international level and warn of the detrimental impact police violence has on the right to freedom of expression and assembly. These rights are key indicators of a government's respect for fundamental human rights and its obligation to uphold and protect the right to protest under international law.

[1] Colombia's Supreme Court of Justice ruling *STC7641-2020* on 22 September 2020

[2] In addition, the Human Rights Committee has recently published [General Comment No. 37](#) on the right of peaceful assembly including recommendations on de-escalation of violence and the proper management of assemblies.

[3] **INCLO** released the toolkit [Defending Dissent: Towards State Practices that Protect and Promote the Rights to Protest](#), published in collaboration with the **International Human Rights Clinic** (IHRC), providing practical guidance on how states can protect and promote protest and public assembly. One other comprehensive publication, which should be considered by political authorities to prevent human rights violations, is a joint **INCLO** and **Physicians for Human Rights** report titled: [Lethal in Disguise: The Health Consequences of Crowd-Control Weapons](#), detailing the health impacts of the misuse of crowd-control weapons across the world.