

May 8,2020

The Right Honorable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Dear Prime Minister,

I wish to thank you and offer my congratulations for your domestic and international leadership in the battle against COVID19. As you have clearly stated, it is obvious that as Canadians we are facing a global challenge and therefore it is necessary to mount a global fight against COVID19. In that sense, I would like to ask you that some of the generous international help you have offered be directed to Colombia, a country of which I am a citizen, as well as of Canada.

As Canadians, we understand that this international help will have to be focused on research and treatments. But, it is also clear that even though this virus does not discriminate in its spread, it is mostly and adversely affecting the less fortunate communities around the world. In the case of Colombia, I would respectfully ask that any help provided by your government be conditional on preferential attention to the needs of afro descendant, indigenous and peasant sectors, as well as the many people who live "day by day", especially in the rural areas of the country.

Given the shameful level of state corruption in Colombia ¹, I would like to ask that any help sent be administered not by the state bureaucracy but rather by civil organizations representative of the recipient communities. For example, the afro Colombian community to which I belong and have been advocating for since I arrived in Canada as a refugee in 2004, does not have any hospital infrastructure due to historical government neglect and that makes it much more vulnerable to COVID19. As a matter of fact, a letter signed by over 500 organizations has been sent recently to the Colombian government, asking for 9.5 billion pesos to be spent in afro Colombian areas affected by the pandemic ². An open letter was also sent to the President, Mr. Ivan Duque Marquez, entitled *Las Vidas Negras Importan* (Black Lives Matter) on behalf of several afro Colombian organizations.

Additionally, indigenous communities like those who live in the Colombian Amazon region and their capital city, Leticia, practically do not have a hospital because the only one they had was recently taken over by the authorities because of the overwhelming rate of contagion. I know this region well, since I worked there as a regional state prosecutor and wrote a book, to be published soon, about my experience fighting corruption and social injustice.

In Canada as well as in Colombia, I belong to several solidarity and human rights defense groups and, as such, I would like to offer my assistance and guidance so that the resources Canada may eventually offer actually reach the communities that really need them. I'm copying the present to the honorable Michele

¹ See: UN worried about corruption in Colombia: <https://www.eluniversal.com.co/colombia/onu-preocupada-por-la-corrupcion-en-colombia-EI2468745>)

² See <https://sostenibilidad.semana.com/impacto/articulo/comunidades-afro-piden-al-gobierno-95-billones-de-pesos-para-atender-la-pandemia-en-sus-territorios/50442>

Bachelet, UN Human Rights High Commissioner. I wrote her a few months ago to inform her about the renewed violence suffered by black communities and human rights defenders in Colombia, in spite of the fact that the government and the FARC guerrillas have signed a peace agreement and we should be living in a post-conflict climate.

Finally, I would like to urge you as well to appeal to all international entities to pay special attention to the social injustices and violence suffered by our communities, in light of resolution 68/237 of the UN General Assembly declaring this decade to be the International Decade of the Afro Descendants.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Angulo', with a stylized flourish at the end.

ELSI ANGULO,
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C.C.: Ms. Michele Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights;
Mr. François-Philippe Champagne, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister
Canadian ambassador to Colombia;
Swedish, Danish, Finish, Norwegian, French, German and US ambassadors in Colombia;
Mr. Ivan Duque Marquez, President of Colombia