
Colombia: the murder of three environmentalists

Gloria Sofia Zapata, Hernando Duque and Eder Alexander Valencia were murdered on October 14, October 20 and November 9. They were members of the environmental organization "Hojas de Hierba" (Herb Leaves) of the municipality of Belén de Umbria in the province of Risaralda. Hector Ivan Escobar and John Jairo Lopez, of the same organization, have had to leave the country.

According to information from the region, the assassination seems to be linked to a local struggle to protect the Umbria valley as an archeological and touristic site against a landfill project in the area. The three activists had also organized events with the community and municipal authorities to halt the spread of large-scale eucalyptus and pine monocultures in the region. As a result of those activities they had received threats and requested protection from the government, which was denied under grounds of lack of resources to protect NGOs.

Local NGOs are now demanding the regional Ombudsman to conduct an enquiry into these murders and express their concern over the lack of response from municipal and environmental state bodies. At the same time, they are organizing a meeting with environmental, community, peasant and indigenous peoples' organizations to analyze the situation created in the region, which will take place on November 28th.

Source: CENSAT-Agua Viva.