

The Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers is deeply concerned at the trial and imprisonment of David Rabelo, Colombian human rights defender and prisoner of conscience, convicted and sentenced to more than 18 years' imprisonment for "aggravated homicide". We have no doubt that this case is politically motivated.

Mr. Rabelo is the spokesperson of regional human rights group CREDHOS and a leading member of MOVICE, the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes. Mr. Rabelo's work has been instrumental in exposing hundreds of members of the Colombian military for human rights crimes, and he helped to reveal links between former President Uribe and paramilitary groups.

Mr. Rabelo's case is marred by severe irregularities. We are concerned by the role of Mr. William Pacheco, Public Prosecutor 22 of the National Antiterrorism Unit, who is leading the investigation against Mr. Rabelo. We understand that Mr. Pacheco was dismissed from the Colombian police and banned from public office for his proven participation in the forced disappearance of Guillermo Hurtado Parra in 1991. Mr. Pacheco's continued role in Mr. Rabelo's case is a severe violation of due process and it is appalling that he continues in office.

In addition, Mr. Rabelo was detained before trial for more than two years, without being convicted of any crime. The investigation against him carried out by the public prosecutor excluded evidence submitted by the defence and the legal process suffered severe delays. Indeed, the final verdict was delayed by over six months.

The evidence against Mr. Rabelo was based on testimonies from two imprisoned paramilitaries. The principal witness, Mr. Mario Jaimes Mejía, alias "El Panadero", has been convicted of two massacres and was imprisoned as a result of Mr. Rabelo's human rights work. His testimony against Mr. Rabelo allowed him to reduce his prison sentence from 40 years to a maximum of eight years.

We believe Mr. Rabelo's conviction is a severe injustice and a violation of his human rights. If the Colombian authorities are to claim a commitment to human rights they must put their rhetoric into action and defend the lives and work of civil society activists.

The Society has written to Mr. Eduardo Montealegre, Colombian Attorney-General, expressing our outrage and shock. We have asked Mr Montealegre to ensure that Mr Rabelo's conviction is quashed.

We extend our solidarity to David Rabelo, his family, friends and comrades in CREDHOS and MOVICE.

8 December 2012