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**Canadian civil society organizations express our opposition to [the possible nomination](#) of Mr. Jorge Londoño de la Cuesta as Colombia's ambassador to Canada. Mr. Londoño is the former general manager of Empresas Públicas de Medellín (EPM), the company responsible for the Hidroituango megaproject.**

On July 5th, several Colombian newspapers [reported that](#) Mr. Londoño could be appointed as Colombia's ambassador to Canada. EPM is the company responsible for the construction of the Hidroituango hydroelectric dam megaproject, which is being developed in spite of strong opposition from affected communities, who have been, from the outset, [denouncing](#) the company's involvement in corruption, environmental damage and human rights violation. Mr. Londoño [left his position](#) at EPM in December 2019.

The period during which Mr. Londoño was general manager of EPM was marked by the [Hidroituango disaster](#). In spring of 2018, the massive dam nearly ruptured after a tunnel belonging to the structure collapsed, provoking severe flooding and forcing the evacuation of tens of thousands of people. More than 130 thousand people [are still at risk](#). Colombian authorities have since confirmed that the tunnel in question, the *galería auxiliar de desviación* (GAD), was not part of the original dam design, but was [approved by EPM](#) as part of a broader plan to accelerate the works. EPM approved the tunnel's construction against the explicit warnings of the project's own technical advisory board, and did so [illegally](#), over a year before obtaining the required license from environmental authorities. EPM's reckless [chain of decisions](#) have placed the [safety](#) and [subsistence](#) of tens of thousands of people at risk. Impacted communities have yet to receive adequate compensation for the damages suffered as a result of the floodings, which destroyed homes and livelihoods and left severe cultural and psychosocial impacts in their wake.

It is important to emphasize that a variety of actors and actresses, including the affected communities united in the [Movimiento Rios Vivos](#), had for years been denouncing corruption and design flaws regarding Hidroituango. Several [experts raised concerns](#) about changes to the dam design and construction, and warned of a disaster like the one that occurred in 2018.

In other words, EPM, then headed by Mr. Londoño, violated the country's environmental regulations and carried out works without the corresponding permits and agreements with local communities. Furthermore, Mr. Londoño is among the figures being investigated by the General Comptroller of Colombia for their presumed [fiscal](#)

[responsibility](#) for irregularities in the Hidroituango project, resulting in losses to the public purse estimated at 4 billion Colombian pesos.

In addition to the harms described above, the 2018 disaster generated great pain for families that were searching for their disappeared relatives. In a region with a history of crimes and massacres perpetrated in the context of the armed conflict, it is presumed that [beneath the waters](#) of Hidroituango lie remains and mass graves that can no longer be exhumed, thereby bringing an end to the hope of families that they will recover the remains of their loved ones.

We see the appointment of the former general manager of EPM as an attempt to gain more political and financial support for the Hidroituango megaproject. The project has already received considerable support from the Canadian governmental financial agency [Export Development Canada \(EDC\)](#) and from the pension funds of the [Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec](#) (CDPQ). Mr. Londoño could also try to advance other mining and energy projects by taking advantage of the diplomatic relationships between Canada and Colombia. These projects have historically had great impacts on the environment and on the way of life of the communities, who are often left out of decision-making and not compensated for the damages caused by extractive activities.

The undersigned Canadian civil society organizations express our rejection of the appointment of Jorge Londoño de la Cuesta as Colombia's ambassador to Canada due to his lack of good judgement and all the pain and injustice he has been involved in during his time as the head of EPM.

Solidarity with the affected communities of the Rios Vivos movement!

Sincerely,

Rosa Peralta, for the Committee for Human Rights in Latin America (CDHAL)

Signed by:

Campagne lavons les mains sales de la Caisse

Centro internacional de solidaridad ouvrière (CISO)

Christian Peacemaker Teams - Canada

Committee for Human Rights in Latin America (CDHAL)

Common Frontiers

Grupo de Trabajo Colombia de Common Frontier

Conseil central Montréal métropolitain de la CSN

Inter Pares

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

La Alianza de Solidaridad y Acción por Colombia (CASA)

MiningWatch Canada

Projet accompagnement solidarité Colombie (PASC)