

Colombian Indigenous leader Luis Fernando Arias dies of COVID-19

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Bogota, February 14 (RHC)-- The National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) reported Saturday that its senior advisor and founder of the Indigenous and Social Movement (MAIS), Luis Fernando Arias, died from complications arising from COVID-19.

"Today the Sierra Nevada de Gonawindúa, heart of the world, mourns the departure of your son Luis Fernando Arias. In unity we will continue your legacy, fly high, dear Senior Advisor," said the ONIC.

Upon hearing the news, numerous personalities and organizations lamented the death of the man who is considered a leader of the 115 indigenous peoples of Colombia, and is recognized for his struggles for peace in the South American nation.

"I report with deep sorrow the passing of my great friend Luis Fernando Arias. Founder of our MAIS Movement and senior advisor to the ONIC. The country loses a great leader, a tireless fighter for just causes," said the president of MAIS, Martha Peralta.

For his part, a member of the Truth Commission and social leader, Leyner Palacios, expressed his sorrow for the loss of Arias who was part of the Kankuamo people, one of the four of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (along with the Kogi, Arhuacos and Wiwas).

"Democracy has lost an extraordinary promoter of unity, trust, and reivindicador of ethnic rights. Solidarity with all indigenous peoples. We must continue his legacy because he will never die," Palacios wrote on his Twitter account.

Arias led the ONIC for more than a decade, and from that position he was at the forefront of national demonstrations by indigenous communities against violence in their territories and presided over talks with the national government to demand the fulfillment of the rights of their peoples.

In mid-January, the indigenous leader was transferred from Valledupar, capital of the department of Cesar, to Barranquilla to receive specialized care due to complications he suffered from coronavirus.

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