

via fax: 011 571 596 0631  
**Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos**  
President of the Republic of Colombia

via fax: 011 57 1 570 2000  
**Sr. Fiscal General Eduardo Montealegre**  
Attorney General of Colombia

October 24, 2016

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely disturbed about the increasing presence of paramilitaries in the **Peace Community of San José de Apartadó** in Antioquia Department. They are waging violence, destroying crops, intruding into homes, and threatening to kill residents of the Peace Community, which was established in 1997.

Over the last few months, scores of paramilitaries, some in military fatigues and identifying themselves as members of the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC), have been intermittently camped in various parts of the Peace Community. Community members report that the paramilitaries have threatened them and told them they are in the area to stay. Security forces have been present in the area and have told members of the community that they are aware of the paramilitary presence, but that they would not take action since the community would only try to distort anything the security forces did.

On October 3 a group of paramilitaries camped in the home of a leader of the Peace Community, Rubí Arteaga, in the hamlet of Mulato Medio. Neither Rubí Arteaga nor her family were at home. According to witnesses, this same group of paramilitaries had been in the nearby hamlet of La Hoz on September 24. The paramilitaries had entered various homes in the hamlet and beat up three peasant farmers. They told the farmers they had orders to kill anyone they wanted. They also said they were looking for several people, three of whom are members of the Peace Community, and that they would kill three to four members of the Community to show who was in charge.

On October 11 members of the Peace Community, accompanied by international observers, travelled to the hamlet of Arenas Bajas to rescue families belonging to the community who had been trapped in their homes since paramilitaries arrived in the area on October 8. The paramilitaries were asked to leave, but they refused, arguing that their main aim was to remain in this area. Families reported that the paramilitaries had also destroyed some of their crops.

This is the twenty-ninth letter we have written to Colombian officials since 2002 about the human rights violations of the people of the San José Peace Community. We believe that the continued presence of paramilitaries in the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó and their persistent killings and threats places members of the community and other local inhabitants at serious risk. Therefore we **strongly urge** that you

- take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces, in line with stated government commitments;
- respect the right of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community and other civilians living in the area not to be drawn into any armed conflict.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinator

and

Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

coipes: Juan Carlos Pinzón, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643  
Andy O'Neal, Human Rights Officer, US Embassy in Colombia ~ via email onealRA@state.gov  
John Brandt, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via email  
José de Jesús Orozco Hernández, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3650  
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

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**The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter:**