

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

via fax: 011 57 1 283 9876
Sr. Ministro Juan Fernando Cristo
 Minister of the Interior

December 26, 2016

Dear Sirs,

We are deeply troubled by the recent assassination attempt on **Argemiro Lara**, a peasant land rights advocate in Sucre Department, who is a member of MOVICE-Sucre branch (National Movement of Victims of State Crimes) and CPDH (Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights).

During the morning of November 17, an unknown assailant on a motorbike pointed a gun at Argemiro Lara, a leader of the La Europa farm in Ovejas municipality, Sucre Department, as he was traveling to a meeting in Sincelejo, accompanied by his state-provided bodyguard. Before the assailant had a chance to fire his weapon, the bodyguard shot him. The assailant later died of his injuries. Both Argemiro Lara and his bodyguard were unharmed.

Argemiro Lara has been repeatedly threatened over the years because of his work in support of the community's claim of ownership over La Europa farm. In 1994, paramilitaries killed 12 peasant farmers and displaced 80 from their farm. Some peasant farmers returned in 2010 and have since then faced threats and harassment. Their homes have also been repeatedly burnt down. The community made a land restitution claim, made possible by the 2011 Victims and Land Restitution Law (Law 1448) in 2013, and their case was finally taken on by the Land Restitution Unit in 2015. However, they are still awaiting the legal adjudication of their claim. In the meantime, the claimants and their leaders continue to face threats. We have previously written to officials in Colombia about some of the threats and assassination attempts (cf our letters of July 6 2014, July 25 2013, June 11 2013).

We are gravely concerned about the recent wave of attacks on human defenders, especially indigenous, Afro-descendant and peasant farmer leaders. Many such attacks are linked to armed groups seeking to take control of resource-rich lands belonging to rural communities in order to exploit these for economic gain.

We strongly urge that you

- guarantee the safety of Argemiro Lara, peasant farmers of La Europa, in strict accordance with their needs and demands
- conduct a full and impartial investigation into the attack and threats against Argemiro Lara, make the results public, and bring the those responsible to justice
- fulfill your obligations regarding the protection of human rights defenders, as set out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Human Rights Defenders.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinator

copies: Amnesty International Urgent Action Network ~ via email
 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 and Human Rights Defenders, 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: