

COLOMBIA

Peace Community validated by Colombian Court

Rapid Response Network News

January 2013

Since 2002, RRN has faxed at least 20 letters to Colombian government officials regarding intimidation, harassment, threats and assassinations of residents of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, a small village in the Urabá region, that **declared itself a “Peace Community” in March 1997, insisting that ALL armed actors—guerrillas, army and paramilitaries—stay out of their villages.** Located approximately 12km from the city of Apartadó, Antioquia Department, San José de Apartadó is comprised of 28 hamlets and has a population of nearly 3,000. Their land is apt for raising cattle and for cultivating corn, cocoa, avocado, yucca, plantains, rice and coffee.

Despite their insistence that they are opposed to all armed violence from all sides, officials in the Colombian government—including former President Alvaro Uribe—have accused Peace Community leaders of being aligned with the FARC guerrillas.

The community has suffered countless assassinations and massacres, including one in February 2005 that left eight people, including two children, dismembered in two separate graves. Pressure from the RRN and the international community led to the conviction of an army captain, who was found guilty and sentenced to 20 years.

Good News

The Colombian Constitutional Court ruled in favor of backing the peace community. The court ordered:

- public retraction of negative statements made by government officials against the community
- creation of an independent commission to examine the reasons why the judicial system has failed the community
- creation of a “house of justice” where the peace community may file complaints about future violations.
- establishment by the Attorney General’s office of procedures for receiving and dealing with the complaints, taking into account the findings of the independent commission.

This court ruling (A 164/12) **not only legally validates the community’s longstanding position, but is the first real move toward real reconciliation between the Colombian government and the Peace Community.**