

via fax: 011 57 1 337 58 90/ 342 05 92 <b>Presidente Alvaro Uribe Velez</b> Presidente de la Republica de Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 562 7822 <b>Dra. Maria Carolina Barco Isakson</b> Ministra de Relaciones Exteriores, Colombia
via fax: 011 57 1 570 2000 <b>Dr. Mario German Iguaran</b> Fiscal General/ Attorney General, Colombia	

November 14, 2005

Dear Sirs:

We are outraged at the murder by army-backed paramilitaries of **Orlando Valencia** following his forced disappearance on October 15 in the presence of members of others: members of the PASC-Canada (Project of Accompaniment of Communities), settlers of the region, and a human rights attorney from the Interchurch Justice and Peace Commission. He had been arbitrarily detained by the police. Both settlers and companions were threatened and followed by the paramilitary in the presence of police. We wrote to you about this case on October 17.

Valencia's body was found October 24 in the Leon River at a place known as Bocas de Zabalo, a 30-minute drive from the municipality of Chirigoro, Antioquia Department. It was identified two days later after a finger-print test. Orlando Valencia had been shot in the forehead and his wrists had marks from being tied. According to forensic investigations, he had probably been killed and thrown into the river by the paramilitaries who had abducted him earlier. He left a wife and seven children, mostly minors.

We now believe that other **members of the Afro-descendant communities of the Jiguiamiando and Curvarado River Basins** are also in grave danger. They have inhabited this territory for more than fifty years and have a collective land title re-affirmed five years ago through Law 70. The police and military have intimidated and attacked Afro-descendant communities and their companions during the last month: robbery of their survival goods, destruction of their humanitarian zones, and death threats.

The government backs these armed operations through the Ministry of Agriculture, which has given territory to Palm Oil businesses so they can continue the illegal planting of African palm in the collective territory. These plantings began after **13 forced displacements, 111 assassinations and forced disappearances** carried out by military, police and paramilitary forces.

As a result of our concern for the safety of the members of the Afro-descendant communities of this area, we strongly urge that you:

- Immediately conduct a full and impartial investigation into the killing of Orlando Valencia, make the results public, and bring those responsible to justice;
- Take all measures deemed appropriate by the communities of the Jiguiamiando and Curvarado River Basins to protect them, in line with repeated InterAmerican Court of Human Rights (IACHR) resolutions;
- Conduct a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Chocó, make the results public, and bring to justice those responsible for supporting and participating in such groups;
- Immediately suspend financial aid to projects which support enterprises producing palm oil, baby bananas, cattle and buffalo in the lower Atrato river without respect for human rights and the territorial rights of the Afro-descendants and indigenous people of these areas;
- Immediately act to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated UN recommendations.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
 Coordinator

cc: Ambassador Luis Alberto Moreno, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 1 202 232 8643  
 Ambassador William B Wood, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011-571-315-2197  
 Heather Merritt, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202.647.2628  
 Comision Intereclesial Justicia y Paz ~ via US mail  
 U.S. Senators DeWine and Voinovich ~ via email  
 U.S. Representatives Brown, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Ryan, Tubbs Jones ~ via email

UA 272.05 Update\_Colombia

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