

via fax: 011 57 1 337 58 90/ 342 05 92 Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez President of the Republic of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 266 0351 Dr. Juan Manuel Santos Minister of Defense of Colombia
via fax: 011 57 1 570 2000 Dr. Mario German Iguaran Arana Attorney General of Colombia	

January 22, 2009

Dear Sirs:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force, are deeply disturbed by the murder of **Edwin Legarda, the husband of indigenous leader Aída Quilcué** of the Regional Council of the Indigenous Communities of Cauca (CRIC). On December 16, 2008, Mr. Legarda was traveling in Cauca Department to prepare for a CRIC Board meeting when Colombian soldiers from the Batallón José Hilario López of the Third Division of the Colombian Army opened fire on him, hitting him with three bullets and his car with seventeen. Mr. Legarda died at the hospital.

This murder is indicative of the lack of effective guarantees on the part of Colombian authorities for the basic rights of indigenous peoples and their leaders, who are disproportionately affected by the internal armed conflict, violence and internal displacement. The National Indigenous Organizations of Colombia (ONIC) has asserted that eighteen distinct groups of indigenous peoples are at risk of imminent extinction. In the fall of 2008, Aída Quilcué was one of the indigenous leaders who launched a national peaceful protest (Minga) to urge the Colombian authorities to change course with respect to indigenous rights, to implement territorial agreements made with indigenous authorities and to agree not to enter into international free trade agreements that negatively affect their rights. This protest, captured by a CNN video broadcast internationally, was met with violence from Colombian security forces.

Because of the murder of Edwin Legarda, and our concern for the safety of Aída Quilcué, her family and other prominent indigenous leaders, we **strongly urge** that you:

- immediately investigate, prosecute and bring to justice the soldiers and their superiors who are responsible for the death of Edwin Legarda, and determine whether or not this act was committed as an act of revenge against Aída Quilcué for her high profile work in support of indigenous rights;
- take immediate and effective steps to guarantee the safety of Aída Quilcué, her family and other prominent indigenous leaders involved in the Minga;
- respect the rights to freedom of opinion, expression and association of indigenous organizations, and respect the right to peaceful protest;
- address the possible imminent extinction of indigenous groups in Colombia by supporting an emergency program created by indigenous organizations and headed by the ONIC that would focus on indigenous communities in danger of extinction,

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Coordinator

cc: Carolina Barco Isakson, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
William Brownfield, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011.571.315.2197
Nan N. Fife, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.4173
Javier Hernández Valencia, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Colombia office ~ via fax: 011-571. 658-3300
Paolo Carozza, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
US Senators Brown & Voinovich ~ via email
US Representatives Boccheri, Fudge, Kaptur, Kucinich, Latta, LaTourette, Ryan, Sutton, Wilson ~ via email

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