

Via fax: 011 57 1 337 5890 Señor Presidente Juan Manuel Santos President of the Republic of Colombia	Via fax: 011 571 562 7822/ 571 562 7836 Sra. Angela Maria Holguin Minister of Foreign Relations of Colombia
---	--

September 11, 2010

Dear Sir and Madam:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force, are deeply distressed over the enforced disappearance and possible killing by army-backed paramilitaries of **Jhon Jairo Palacios**, a member of an Afro-descendant community in the Cacarica River Basin. He was abducted after he left his home in the Barranquilla area of the Cacarica River Basin to take a boat to the municipal capital, Riosucio, Chocó Department. On July 30 he told his family by telephone that he would be returning to the Cacarica River Basin the following morning. When his family called his mobile phone the next day, a man identifying himself as a member of a paramilitary group said, "Tell his family that he is already dead." When the family asked where his body was, the man told them only that he had been abducted in Riosucio and taken far away. On August 9 sources close to the paramilitaries claimed that paramilitaries had killed Jhon Jairo Palacios.

The Cacarica River Basin is earmarked for a major road-building project, which the Cacarica communities have opposed. The enforced disappearance and possible killing of Jhon Jairo Palacios came days before a contract was awarded for the construction of the road. We are concerned that his enforced disappearance may be an attempt to silence opposition and that other people may be killed to silence local opposition.

Paramilitaries have maintained a strong presence in the region, although army-backed paramilitaries were supposedly demobilized under a government-backed process during the previous government of President Alvaro Uribe. Amnesty International has received reports of a regular paramilitary presence in La Honda and Tumarado, where paramilitaries stop and search people traveling into the Cacarica River Basin. Although these people have insisted they are civilian communities, paramilitaries and other combatants have repeatedly threatened, killed, and committed other human rights abuses in their community, including displacing 3000 Afro-Colombians in February 1997.

Because of our concern for the preceding events, we **strongly urge** that you:

- do everything necessary to establish the whereabouts of Jhon Jairo Palacios, and if still alive, to guarantee his safety and to order a full and impartial investigation into his enforced disappearance, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- guarantee the safety of the Afro-descendant population of Cacarica as deemed appropriate by that population;
- take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Coordinator

cc: Comision Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz ~ via US mail
 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
 Christian Salazar Volkmann, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Colombia office ~ via fax: 011-571. 658-3300
 Dinah Shelton, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 Rodrigo Escobar Gil, Colombia 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, LaTourette, Latta, Ryan, Space, Sutton, Wilson ~ via email

UA/185/10_Colombia

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