

via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631 Sr. Juan Manuel Santos President of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 599 8961 Sr. German Vargas Lieras Minister of Interior and Justice of Colombia
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December 15, 2010

Dear Sirs:

We are very concerned for the safety of the **civilian population of Argelia Municipality, Cauca Department**, especially after the **assassination of peasant farmer Milton Díaz Cabezas** on December 2.

On November 28 about 120 heavily armed paramilitaries, most of them in camouflage, blockaded the hamlet of Las Perlas, part of Argelia Municipality. Men known to be paramilitaries have been seen talking with soldiers and patrolling with them in the town of Argelia; paramilitaries and soldiers have set up joint checkpoints on the access road to the town.

On November 30, sixty people, including children, managed to flee Las Perlas, while most of the town's population remained blockaded by the paramilitaries who have threatened to kill them. They have threatened the women with sexual assault. Those left behind were told, "if the guerrillas fight and one of us dies, you will also die." On December 2, after a night of combat between guerrillas and paramilitaries, peasant farmer **Milton Díaz Cabezas**, was killed by two paramilitaries after they took him out of his house in the nearby hamlet of El Porvenir.

The paramilitaries have announced that they are going to control the region, saying, "our objective is to seize the area of El Plateado before the end of the year." They have also threatened civilians elsewhere in Argelia in the communities of las Cumbres, Cristales Altos, Cristales Bajos, Miro lindo, La Playa, La Primavera and Campo Alegre. Although the area is heavily militarized, no apparent action has been taken to confront the paramilitaries.

Because of the danger to all the people of Argelia Municipality, we **strongly urge that you**

- take decisive action to guarantee the civilian population's right to life and the right to not be drawn into the conflict in Argelia Municipality;
- order a full and impartial investigation into the threats and killings described above and bring those responsible to justice;
- 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

Copies: Gabriel Silva Luján, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
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 Rodrigo Escobar Gil, Colombia member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz ~ via US mail
 US Senators Brown & Voinovich ~ via email
 US Representatives Boccieri, Fudge, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Ryan, Space, Sutton, Wilson ~ via email

UA 264/10 Colombia

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