

Via Fax: 011 57 1 596 0631  
**Sr. Presidente Juan Manuel Santos**  
 President of Colombia

Via Fax: 011 57 1 599 8961  
**Sr. German Vargas Lleras**  
 Minister of Interior and Justice of Colombia

August 15, 2011

Dear Sirs:

We are gravely concerned that Afro-descendant communities of the Curvaradó and neighboring Jiguamiandó River Basins in Chocó Department, who had been driven off their land, returned to find that it had been illegally occupied by commercial agriculture companies, namely African palm (palm oil). In addition to continual threats and killings, those who returned have faced repeated attempts by African palm growers to falsify title deeds to the land to drive them off again, despite the fact that their collective land title has been recognized by the government.

In particular, **we are concerned for Alvaro González (threatened), Enrique Petro (threatened), and two members of the community council of Caracoli in the La Florida area of the Curvarado River Basin who have been forcibly disappeared: Francisco Piñeda and Everto González.**

On July 23, a paramilitary group forcibly took Everto González from in Gengado Medio, Curvarado River Basin region. He has not been seen since. On August 1, paramilitaries told relatives and neighbors of his nephew, Alvaro González, that they were now looking for Alvaro González to kill him.

Also on August 1, a group of paramilitaries approached Francisco Piñeda, told him they were going to "resolve some land issues" and took him with them. Later the same day, Francisco Pineda managed to contact his relatives to inform them he was being held by paramilitaries. His relatives have not heard from him since, and his whereabouts remain unknown.

Many residents and leaders of the Afro-descendant communities in the area have been threatened by paramilitaries because of their stance in defense of their land rights and against palm oil companies. Enrique Petro, leader of the community council of Andalucia, was recently threatened with death. Paramilitary activities have been repeatedly denounced in the area of the Curvarado River Basin, in areas where members of the XVII Brigade of the armed forces are present. In our letter to you on June 8, we related an incident when women leaders of Caracoli were threatened by paramilitaries in front of soldiers of the XVII Army Brigade; the soldiers did not react when asked to help.

Because of these incidents, we **strongly urge** you as officers of the government

- to do everything necessary to establish the whereabouts of Francisco Pineda and Everto Gonzalez, and to guarantee their safety and the safety of Alvaro Gonzalez, Enrique Petro and other members of the Afro-descendant community who have been threatened;
- to launch a full, impartial and independent investigation into the enforced disappearance of Francisco Pineda and Everto Gonzalez and death threats against Alvaro Gonzalez, Enrique Petro and other members of the Afro-descendant community, to publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other bodies.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

cc: Comision Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz ~ via US mail  
 Gabriel Silva Luján, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643  
 P. Michael McKinley, US Ambassador to Colombia ~via fax: 011.571.315.0811  
 Terry Steers-Gonzalez, Senior Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.4173  
 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 and Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Renacci, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

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