

via fax: 011 57 1596 0631 <b>Sr. Juan Manuel Santos</b> President of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 266 1003 <b>Sr. Juan Carlos Pinzón</b> Minister of Defense of Colombia
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December 15, 2011

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely concerned for the safety of residents of the hamlet of La Esperanza, Apartadó Municipality, Antioquia Department, which is one of several hamlets and villages forming the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó. On November 19 and 20, paramilitaries set up checkpoints on roads around La Esperanza and two other hamlets close to the Peace Community. They stopped and questioned anyone travelling on these roads, took whatever food they had with them and told the people they were forbidden to take food back to their houses. These threats come at a time when, despite the fact that the area around the Peace Community is heavily militarized, there have been reports that paramilitaries have consolidated their presence in the area.

On November 28, almost 200 paramilitaries came to La Esperanza, held 50 members of the Peace Community captive in the health centre in La Esperanza for several hours, took their names and said they would "investigate" them. The paramilitaries came from a base in Playa Larga, a hamlet close to La Esperanza, where they own land. They have told local residents that they will take control of any land they require in La Esperanza and other nearby hamlets regardless of the owner's wishes.

Since 2002, we have faxed at least 18 letters to Colombian government officials regarding intimidation, harassment, threats and assassinations of residents of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó. On May 2 of this year, we asked you to investigate the March 22 murder of **Bernardo Londoño**, a member of the Peace Community, by paramilitaries. We have not yet heard a response.

We **strongly urge** that you

- conduct a full and impartial investigations into the threats against members of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- respect the right of civilians, including members of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community, not to be drawn into the armed conflict;
- 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 intergovernmental organizations.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
 Coordinator

CC: Peace Community of San José de Apartadó ~ 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: 011.571.315.2197  
 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 & Portman ~ via email  
 US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Renacci, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

UA/103/11\_Colombia

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