

via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631 <b>Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos</b> President of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 266 1003 <b>Estimado Sr. Juan Carlos Pinzón</b> Defense Minister of Colombia
via fax: 011 57 1 381 4742 <b>Estimada Sr. María Ángela Holguin</b> Minister of Foreign Affairs of Colombia	

August 13, 2012

Dear Sirs and Madam:

We are deeply concerned for the safety of **thousands of civilians in Cauca Department** as the armed conflict escalates between the security forces and the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC). Fighting in the municipalities of Toribío, Jambaló, Caldono, Silva, Caloto, Miranda, Suárez, Morales and Argelia have put the indigenous, peasant farmers and Afro-descendant communities on the front line. In Toribío, more than 80 homes have been damaged and 400 people forcibly displaced. In Argelia a boy was killed and several injured after an explosion. In Caldono 18-year old **Fabian Guetio Vasquez** was fatally shot in the back of the neck by the Colombian Army while walking to his father's house on July 18. In the indigenous community of Lopez Adentro, **Lisandro Tenorio**, a traditional spiritual healer of the Nasa tribe, was shot dead by unidentified gunmen on August 12.

Tired of the ongoing clashes between government security forces and the FARC, residents of Toribío took matters into their own hands. On July 9 they dismantled military trenches by throwing sand bags into the river. They held a community arts and cultural festival, painting banners with slogans such as "We want peace." They said they would play music to drown out the sound of bullets firing around their community. A delegation of community leaders walked into the hills to dialogue with the FARC, which has attacked this community over a dozen times so far this year.

On July 17, native Nasa residents continued their direct action for peace. Carrying sticks, 1,000 Nasa community members ascended the Cerro Berlin (two hours from Toribío) and drove about 100 soldiers from an army post, lifting and carrying some soldiers down the mountain. The Nasa planned to leave 250 of their members there to prevent the army from returning. The next day police used tear gas to remove them; a reported 24 people were injured, three of them seriously.

Because of the continuing violence and threats, we **strongly urge you** to:

- order full and impartial investigations into the shooting deaths of Fabian Guetio Vasquez and Lisandro Tenorio, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- recognize that construction of military bases within indigenous territories requires free, prior and informed consent from the community under Colombian and international law.
- carry out your obligation to protect civilians, who have the right to not to be drawn into hostilities.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
 Coordinator

CC: Gabriel Silva Luján, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643  
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 US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email  
 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:**