

via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631
Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos
 President of Colombia

via fax: 011 57 1 266 1003
Sr. Juan Carlos Pinzón
 Minister of Defense of Colombia

May 23, 2014

Dear President Santos and Minister Pinzón:

We are deeply concerned for the safety of Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission leader **Danilo Rueda** and human rights defenders **Orlando Castillo** and **Luis Yasmani Grueso Sinisterra** in the Humanitarian Zone of Puente Nayero in the in the Barrio La Playita of the city Buenaventura in Valle del Cauca Department.

Humanitarian zones are clearly delineated civilian residential areas where armed forces of any kind are not supposed to enter. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has backed these zones since 2005 and has required the government to grant them special protection. The Humanitarian Zone of Puente Nayero was created on April 13 in a public event with the participation of representatives from the Catholic Church, and local, national and international human rights organizations.

Thousands of families have been forcibly displaced by large-scale infrastructure projects being developed in Buenaventura. Many have been tortured and killed by paramilitaries and their bodies dumped in secret cemeteries or into the sea. We find it incomprehensible that such human rights abuses can take place in spite of the presence of large contingents of police and Marine Infantry units in Buenaventura.

We are particularly concerned by recent events at Puente Nayero:

- April 12: **Carlos Andrés Angarita Jimenes**, age 16, was tortured, killed and dismembered by paramilitaries
- April 22: community members learned of a paramilitary order to kill Orlando Castillo, who has received repeated death threats in phone calls by paramilitaries.
- April 22: a paramilitary, who had tried to recruit children in Puente Nayero, threatened Danilo Rueda and other human rights defenders
- April 23: a relative of Luis Yasmani Grueso Sinisterra learned of paramilitary threats to kill him.

Over the past decade, we have written at least 13 letters to Colombian officials denouncing threats to members of the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, including Danilo Rueda. In view of the preceding information, we **strongly urge** that you

- provide effective protection for Danilo Rueda, Orlando Castillo and Luis Yasmani Grueso Sinisterra, in strict accordance with their wishes;
- order an immediate, full and impartial investigation into paramilitary threats against the above-named human rights defenders and the residents of Buenaventura, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinator

cc: Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz ~ via fax
 Luis Carlos Villegas, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
 Kevin Whitaker, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011.571.275.4600
 Olivia Franken, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.2628
 José de Jesús Orozco Hernández, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

UA 104/14_Colombia

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