

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 Defense Minister of Colombia
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June 22, 2014

Dear Sirs:

We are writing to express our deep concern for the safety of, land claimant **Rafael Truaquero**, and community leader **Yomaira Mendoza**, and land restitution leader **Enrique Cabezas** in the Curvaradó River Basin in Chocó Department. Enrique Cabezas has been critical of links between paramilitaries and Colombian security forces and has denounced government plans to establish a military base on land collectively owned by Afro-descendant communities there.

On 20 May, a group of armed men came looking for Enrique Cabezas in a house in which he was hiding in the hamlet of Llano Rico, Ríosucio Municipality, Chocó Department. (There is a military base there: Jungle Battalion 54, part of the XVII Brigade.) He had received a death threat by telephone, warning that he would be killed that night. On the same day, Rafael Truaquero was warned by telephone that he and his family, including his sister Yomaira Mendoza (cf our letter of March 26, 2014), would be killed if he did not provide information about the whereabouts of Enrique Cabezas. Yomaira Mendoza and Enrique Cabezas fled the area after receiving threatening text messages on May 21 and 22.

This kind of intimidation is happening in spite of the fact that collective land rights were granted by the Colombian state to the Afro-descendant communities of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basin in 2000. We are well aware of and appalled by the fact that in the intervening years paramilitaries, acting with the support of the armed forces, have forced many of the inhabitants to flee while powerful economic interests—namely growers of African palm for palm oil—are developing operations in these areas.

The Constitutional Court has repeatedly ordered that the lands should be returned to the community councils of Curvaradó. The Inter-American Court has issued provisional protection measures for the communities of Curvaradó and the Jiguamiandó River Basin, and yet the efforts taken by Colombian authorities to guarantee their have been seriously inadequate and, as a result, many residents have been killed by paramilitaries acting with impunity. The NGO Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP) accompanies these communities; CIJP members are also routinely targeted (cf our letters of March 22 and May 23, 2014).

In view of the information cited above, we therefore strongly urge that you

- provide effective protection for Enrique Cabezas, Rafael Truaquero and Yomaira Mendoza, in accordance with their wishes.
- order an immediate, full and impartial investigation into the attempt to kill Enrique Cabezas and into the threat against Rafael Truaquero and others, publish the results, and bring all those responsible to justice;
- dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the Colombian security forces, in line with repeated United Nations human rights recommendations.

We remind you that it is your obligation to ensure the safety of these Afro-descendant communities.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Co-Coordinator

copies: 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

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