

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

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

August 14, 2014

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply troubled that members of the Colombian armed forces have threatened to “exterminate” the **Peace Community of San José de Apartadó** in Antioquia Department.

On July 21, a soldier told a resident who has close links with the Peace Community that “the time has arrived...we are coordinating with the paramilitaries for the extermination of that son-of-a-bitch Peace Community.” On July 19 a local newspaper published an article with statements from the new commander of the XVII Army Brigade who is a former commander of the Voltígeros Battalion, which regularly operates in the area. The XVII Brigade has a grave human rights record and the units attached to it, including the Voltígeros Battalion, have repeatedly colluded with paramilitary forces in the area. The commander said that the XVII Brigade would do special work with the hamlets of San José de Apartadó to recuperate land. He was alluding to the areas which make up the Peace Community, whose residents understand this as a further threat to exterminate them.

Paramilitaries continue to operate from the bases they have established in the vicinity of the hamlets of the Peace Community. In recent weeks they have forced people living in the area of San José de Apartadó to attend meetings in the hamlet of Rodoxali.

This is the twenty-fifth letter we have written to Colombian officials since 2002 about the human rights violations of the people of the San José Peace Community. Since the Peace Community’s establishment in March 1997, more than 200 of its members and other civilians living in the area have been killed or subjected to enforced disappearance. Guerrilla forces have killed some Peace Community members, but the majority of assassinations and massacres have been committed by paramilitaries, who operate with the support and acquiescence of the Colombian armed forces in the area. Colombian authorities have done little to protect the community, despite a March 15, 2005 resolution by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights calling on them to do so.

Because we continue to be concerned for the safety of the members of the **Peace Community of San José de Apartadó** and other civilians living in the area, we **strongly urge** that you

- order a full and impartial investigations into the threats described by members of the army, and the threats and presence of paramilitaries, 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 stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other inter-governmental organizations.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinator

copies: Peace Community of San José de Apartadó ~ via US mail
 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: