

via fax: 011 57 1 59 60631 Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos President of the Republic of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 283 9876 Sr. Aurelio Iragorri Valencia Minister of Interior of Colombia
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February 26, 2015

Dear Sirs:

We are very disturbed by the threats made by the Black Eagles paramilitary groups against leaders of the Afro-descendant community of La Toma in Suarez in Cauca Department. They have been calling on authorities to take action on illegal mining operations in their community.

On February 8 **Sabino Lucumi**, the President of the Community Council of the Afro-descendant community of La Toma, received a death threat via SMS text. The threat also targets **Eduar Mina**, Coordinator of the Human Rights Committee of La Toma, **Jhon Jairo Valverde**, their financial officer, and **Francia Marquez**, their legal representative. The threat, signed by the Black Eagles paramilitary group, stated: "we already know the movements of the leaders and your families...we have orders to carry out a cleansing in the south of Valle Cauca of those who block the roads."

These threats come in response to La Toma activists who have called upon national and regional authorities to take action against illegal mining in the region and to remove the digging machinery used in the illegal mines (cf our letter of Oct 26, 2014). On December 29, 2014, community leaders stopped the illegal mining work carried out by corporate miners and contacted the authorities, who impounded and destroyed one of the machines. The message also makes an apparent reference to a march by women from La Toma to Bogotá in late November 2014 to demand the government take action to end the illegal mining operations.

Like hundreds of communities across the country, La Toma faces the threat of its livelihood being displaced by industrial mining. Between 2002 and 2010, Colombia's government gave out 7,500 mining exploration titles to Colombian and foreign nationals and mining companies. But many of these concessions overlap in areas where communities have practiced small- and medium-scale mining for generations. Afro-descendants and indigenous communities have the right to be consulted prior to infrastructure and resource extraction projects. But La Toma was never consulted before mining titles were granted. According to the Northern Cauca Afro-descendant Women's March for the Defense of Life in our Ancestral Territories, in northern Cauca there are 2000 illegal backhoes and 267 mining titles and concessions authorized by the government without prior consultation.

In light of the dramatically increasing frequency and severity of threats to the La Toma community, we **strongly urge** you to

- carry out an immediate, thorough, and impartial investigation into the death threats described above, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- immediately provide effective comprehensive collective protection to those threatened, in accordance with their wishes and needs;
- take action against paramilitary forces and break any links between them and security forces; and
- fulfill your obligation to protect human rights defenders as set out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Co-Coordinator

coipes: NOMADESC: Association for Social Research and Action ~ via US mail
 Luis Carlos Villegas, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via fax 1 202 232 8643
 Kevin Whitaker, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax 011 571 275 4600
 Eric Falls, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Dept. ~ via fax 1 202 647 2628
 Jose de Jesus Orozco Henriquez, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, via fax 1 202 458 3650
 Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, Rapporteur on the Rights of Afro-Descendants, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: (202)458-3650
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

UA33/15_Colombia

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