

via fax: 011 571 596 0631
Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos
 President of the Republic of Colombia

via fax: 011 57 1 283 9876
Sr. Ministro Juan Fernando Cristo
 Minister of Interior of Colombia

May 12, 2016

Dear Sirs:

We are writing to express our deep concern for the safety of Afro-descendant leaders from Cauca Department who have been threatened as a consequence of their campaign to protect their territorial rights and against illegal mining. On 28 April, **Francia Márquez**, a leader of the Afro-descendant community of La Toma in Suárez Municipality, Cauca Department, received a death threat by text to her mobile phone. The threat also named two other leaders, **Eduar Mina** and **Jhon Jairo Valverde**, and was signed BACRIN [sic], an obvious reference to paramilitary groups which continue to operate as criminal gangs. We are also concerned for the safety of the sister and cousin of Francia Márquez, **Alexa Leonor Mina** and **Mery Yein Mina**, who are also human rights defenders.

This was not an isolated incident. Francia Márquez and other La Toma community leaders have faced repeated threats following their efforts to demand protection for the community's ancestral land rights and to prevent the exploitation of their territories by outside mining interests. In December 2014, the government reached an agreement with the community to take action, but little has been done to stop illegal mining operations or to stop threats against mining-resistance leaders. Francia Márquez, Eduar Mina and Jhon Jairo Valverde all continued to receive threats last year (cf our letters of January 23 and February 26, 2015).

On April 27, two unidentified men came to Suárez and demanded to know the whereabouts of Alexa Leonor Mina and Mery Yein Mina. On 25 April, both women had participated in a "Protection of Life and Ancestral Territory" demonstration in Santander del Quilichao, Cauca Department. Participants reported that the ESMAD (Mobile Anti-Disturbance Squadron) anti-riot police used excessive force against some of those participating in the protest.

In view of this information, we therefore strongly urge that you

- take all necessary measures to guarantee the safety of Francia Marquez, Eduar Mina, Jhon Lairó Valverde, Alexa Leonor Mina, Mery Yein Mina and other community leaders of La Toma;
- undertake full and impartial investigations into the threat against Francia Marquez, Eduar Mina, Jhon Lairó Valverde, make the results public and bring all those responsible to justice;
- take decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups operating in the area of LaToma and break any links with the security forces in line with repeated United Nations human rights recommendations.

We sincerely hope that you will bring the full power of your office to bear on the crimes and injustices detailed above.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai and Christine Stonebraker-Martínez
 Co-coordinators

copies: Asociación de Consejos Comunitarios del Norte del Cauca ~ via US mail
 Juan Carlos Pinzón, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
 Andy O'Neal, Human Rights Officer, US Embassy in Colombia ~ via email onealRA@state.gov
 John Brandt, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via email
 José de Jesús Orozco Hernández, Rapporteur for Colombia and for Human Rights Defenders, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3650
 Margarett May Macaulay, 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

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