

via fax: 011 571 596 0631 <b>Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos</b> President of the Republic of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 570 2000 <b>Sr. Fiscal General Eduardo Montealegre</b> Attorney General of Colombia
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September 24, 2016

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely concerned about the latest presence of paramilitaries in the **Peace Community of San José de Apartadó** in Antioquia Department. Located approximately 12 km from the city of Apartadó, San José de Apartadó is comprised of 28 hamlets and has a population of nearly 3,000. The residents declared themselves a "Peace Community" in March 1997, insisting that ALL armed actors — guerrillas, army and paramilitaries — stay out of their town and surrounding hamlets. 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. Since 2002, we have sent more than 25 letters to Colombian government officials regarding intimidation, harassment, threats and assassinations of residents of the Peace Community. The latest violations include the following:

September 5: A contingent of paramilitaries carrying long guns and wearing military uniforms camped in the Peace Community settlement in the hamlet of Arenas Altas. On the same day paramilitaries moved into the primary school in the hamlet of La Hoz. In both places they claimed that they intended to stay because nobody can make them leave. It appears that the Colombian armed forces are offering protection to the paramilitaries, allowing them to remain there.

September 7: At 4pm, a group of paramilitaries in the community of Porvenir in the township of San Jose, detained several peasants and took their cell phones. They accused the people of being guerrillas before releasing them hours later.

September 8: About 11am, military troops entered the hamlet of Arenas Altas and demanded the immediate withdrawal of people from their living and community work spaces. At 1pm the same day a paramilitary group held a continued presence in Porvenir; they warned that they would continue to be present in the region.

September 9: In the community of Tequerita, between the hamlets of La Hoz and Mulato, paramilitaries told several residents that they will be patrolling the region.

September 10: On local and national radio stations, Eliecer Arteaga, the Mayor of Apartadó, denied (in cynical and inappropriate language) the strong presence of paramilitary troops in several villages of the township of San José.

On several occasions in recent weeks, known paramilitaries present in the community of Playa Larga have said to residents there that "the ones in the way are those from the Peace Community" and that "they are more guerrillas than the guerrillas."

These actions directly contradict the recently signed peace accords between the government and FARC. Therefore, we **strongly urge** that you take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces, in line with stated government commitments.

Sincerely,

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

copies: 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  
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José de Jesús Orozco Hernández, Rapporteur for Colombia, 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

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