

<p>via fax: 011 571 596 0631 <b>Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos</b> President of the Republic of Colombia</p>	<p>via fax: 011 57 1 570 2000 <b>Estimado Sr. Fiscal General Señor Néstor Humberto Martínez Neira</b> Attorney General of Colombia</p>
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March 22, 2016

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply concerned for the safety of members of **Afro-descendant and indigenous communities in Chocó Department**, who are the victims of forced displacement. Since the start of the peace process, and especially since September 2015, there has been increased paramilitary activity in the Alto Baudó region.

On March 4, about 200 armed members of the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC) entered the town of Peña Azul in the municipality of Alto Baudó looking for members of the National Liberation Army (ELN). Nearly 400 people from 128 mostly Afro-descendant families were forced to flee for fear of their lives. The whereabouts of eight families remains unknown. The other displaced people took refuge at Pie de Pato in the urban zone of Alta Baudó, where the municipality is providing humanitarian aid. Nearby communities are possibly confined to the hamlets of Boca de Apartadó, Boca de León, Geandó, Punta Peña, Bacal, Amparrado and Cocalito due to these events.

Luis Murillo, regional representative of the Ombudsperson's Office, said that since 2009 his office has repeatedly raised concerns about "this already vulnerable Afro-descendant population" and that there has been "no integrated response from the government to protect the community." He told Amnesty International that the situation has worsened in the past couple of months.

Indigenous communities in Chocó are also threatened. Since February 21, clashes between the armed forces and illegal armed groups have forced 106 indigenous people from 32 families of the Chagpien Tordó reserve in Bajo San Juan to flee to Buenaventura in Valle Del Cauca Department. According to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), some families were not able to move because they have mobility restrictions; they and four minor-age women are at risk of forced recruitment by the paramilitaries or the ELN.

Since 2014 the AGC, which are remnants of the paramilitary groups demobilized a decade ago, have tried to take control of Alto Baudó and other municipalities of the region. The constitutional court has ruled that the Colombian government must provide information and effective protection measures to the displaced communities as well as those in confinement. Because the increase in paramilitary activity described above is placing Afro-descendant and indigenous communities at great risk, we **strong urge** that you

- implement protection measures and a safe return or relocation, in strict accordance with the wishes of those communities under threat;
- take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinator

copies: Juan Carlos Pinzón, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643  
Rebecca Daley, Human Rights Officer, US Embassy in Colombia ~ via email DaleyRS@state.gov  
Colombia Desk, US State Department (attention: Ian Arzeni and Gail Morgado) ~ via email  
José de Jesús Orozco Hernández, Rapporteur for Colombia and Human Rights Defenders, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3650  
Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur for the Rights of Afro-descendants, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3650  
Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 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:**