

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

via fax: 011 57 1 570 2000  
**Estimado Sr. Fiscal General Señor Néstor Humberto Martínez Neira**  
Attorney General of Colombia

March 25, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely disturbed about the increased presence of paramilitary groups who are **threatening communities in the Jiguamiandó River basin in Chocó Department**. Despite the fact that the humanitarian zones of the Urada Jiguamiandó reservation, Pueblo Nuevo, and Nueva Esperanza have been granted protectionary measures by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Constitutional Court of Colombia, the situation has not changed; it has worsened since the beginning of March.

The Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP) has reported that 40 members of the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia occupied the Santa Rosa farm for two days and have harassed the communities of the Jiguamiandó River basin, intimidating them with their presence, threatening their leaders and reasserting their intentions to take control of the territory.

Residents of the Urada Jiguamiandó humanitarian reservation notified the CIJP that they are currently surrounded by paramilitary members in the areas of La Mina, La Selva, El Tamboral, El Chorro, Canalón, La Dominga and the Abracharia farm near the Jiguamiandó River basin. The Afro-Colombian residents of the humanitarian zones of Pueblo Nuevo and Nueva Esperanza have also reported this situation to the Ombudsperson; they have not yet received a response from the State.

Because of the State's absence, armed groups have moved in and threatened leaders. Since March 8, leaders of humanitarian zones such as **Manuel Denis Blandón, Melkin Romaña, Erasmo Sierra and Benjamín Sierra** have been threatened. Indigenous leader **Argemiro Bailarín**, member of the Local Council of the Urada Jiguamiandó Embera reservation, learned of a plan to assassinate him because of his defense of the collective territory.

CIJP works to enable indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River basins to reclaim their territories, to which they have returned in recent years after being violently displaced by paramilitary and security forces in the late 1990s. Since 2015 there has been a renewed paramilitary presence, stirring up fear, threatening community leaders, and killing residents. Despite warnings from the Ombudsperson about risks of mass displacements, the State response has not been comprehensive or timely.

We **strongly urge** that you

- make a comprehensive response to the reports from the communities of the Jiguamiandó River basin, ensuring that the boundaries of the humanitarian zones are respected, guaranteeing the safety of their residents and demanding that the presence of the authorities is strengthened at access points to the river;
- insist that humanitarian zones are respected and the safety of the leaders ensured, in compliance with the provisions established in relation to victims in the Peace Agreement with the FARC;
- take immediate action to break up paramilitary groups, in accordance with the commitments made by the government and recommendations from international 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 on 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

UA 62/17\_Colombia

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