

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 Néstor Humberto Martínez Neira</b> Attorney General of Colombia
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May 26, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely disturbed by reports of police repression and injuries to the **residents of Buenaventura** in the Department of Valle del Cauca that have been occurring during the peaceful protests there since May 16.

On May 16 the community of Buenaventura declared a general strike to demand that the national government guarantee their economic, social and cultural rights, and their right to participate in the implementation of the peace agreements with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The organizers called on the residents to stop all commercial and school activities and to take to the streets in peaceful protest until the government provides an adequate and prompt response to their demands. During a peaceful demonstration on Saturday May 20, agents from the Mobile Anti-Riot Squadron (ESMAD) fired tear gas without warning at demonstrators, including children, persons with disabilities and elderly persons, who were gathered on the Piñal bridge and in the sector of La Delfina, two of the eight meeting points of the demonstration. The local NGO Black Communities' Process (PCN) reported that this unwarranted repression incited a confrontation between the security forces and demonstrators and resulted in several people being injured, including two children. PCN made an urgent call to strengthen the presence of human rights authorities in order to prevent confrontations and repression.

In spite of fears of further repression and violence, peaceful demonstrations were held again on May 21 and May 22 in different parts of Buenaventura and surrounding rural areas. The Indigenous Guard, an unarmed protection corps from various indigenous communities around the country, also participated in the demonstrations to protect demonstrators from further violence. Protesters announced that the general strike will be maintained until the government addresses the issues at stake.

Buenaventura is populated mostly by Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities. There is a high level of violence because of drug traffickers, criminal gangs, and other armed groups, including guerrillas. Eighty percent of the population lives in poverty. Three years ago the community and government negotiated an agreement in which the government would take immediate action to provide water and sanitation to all of Buenaventura, build a modern hospital, and improve the education system. Most of these promises are yet to be met.

Demonstrations in support of the general strike have also been announced in other cities. Local groups in Buenaventura are concerned that as the demonstrations grow, so does the risk of violent repression on the part of State security forces. Therefore we **strongly urge** that you

- guarantee people's right to participate in peaceful demonstrations, in particular the general strike in Buenaventura and other cities;
- refrain from engaging in undue force and respect the human rights of all demonstrators in Buenaventura and other cities;
- take immediate measures to guarantee the fundamental rights to water, health and quality education of the residents of Buenaventura, and the right to participate in the implementation of the peace agreement signed with FARC.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai                      and                      Christine Stonebraker-Martinez  
 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  
 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 email  
 Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email  
 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:**