

via email: contacto@presidencia.gov.co
Excmo. Sr. Presidente Juan Manuel Santos
President of the Republic of Colombia

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

September 25, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply concerned for the safety of **Wounaan and Embera indigenous communities in Chocó Department**. Their territorial rights and physical safety continue to be violated by the presence of and clashes between paramilitary groups, the National Liberation Army (ELN) rebel group, and state security forces. At least one person has been killed: **Ana María Mepaquito**, a 22-year-old indigenous woman and mother of three young children, died after she was caught in crossfire Riosucio municipality on August 22.

On August 20, troops of the Colombian armed forces and the ELN exchanged gunfire in a confrontation just 700 meters from the Wounaan territory of Puerto Olave on the San Juan River. Then just two days later, on August 22, there was another armed confrontation (between the ELN and the paramilitary organization Gaitanistas Self-Defenses of Colombia, or AGC); this time it was fought inside the communities of JUUN DUR (a Wounaan indigenous reserve) and QUIPARALITO (an Embera indigenous reserve) on the banks of the Truandó River in Riosucio municipality. Ana María Mepaquito was caught in the crossfire and died from a gunshot wound.

These communities are trapped. Armed checkpoints on the river and anti-personnel mines keep them from escaping either by water or land. This confinement prevents them from hunting, which is their main food source. The mines surrounding the communities make it difficult to transport food in, creating a serious humanitarian situation. Also troubling are reports by the Wounaan Authorities' Community Council (WOUNDEKO) about increasing forced recruitment among indigenous girls and boys in the area.

We wrote to you about this dangerous situation last month after an 18-year-old JUUN DUUR indigenous man in Riosucio municipality was wounded by an anti-personnel mine explosion (cf our letter of Aug 21 2017). We are concerned that the danger now appears to be spreading: the indigenous round table of Chocó stated that the neighboring communities of Peñas Blancas, Jagual, Marcial and Pichindé are at imminent risk of forced displacement due to clashes between armed groups.

We therefore **strongly urge** that you

- seek an immediate humanitarian agreement between the Colombian government and the ELN, as part of the current peace process, so as to end the hostilities and achieve a mutual ceasefire
- ensure urgent humanitarian relief to the communities of JUUN DUR and QUIPARALITO
- provide protection for the neighboring communities of Peñas Blancas, Jagual, Marcial and Pichindé and all peoples in the river basins of the Truandó and San Juan Rivers

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinators

and

Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

copies: Camilo Reyes, 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: Ryan Reid, Senior Desk Officer ~ via email
Colombia Desk, US State Department: Christine Russell, Desk Officer for Human Rights ~ via email
José de Jesús Orozco Hernández, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
Amnesty International, Urgent Action Network ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

UA178/17update_Colombia

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