

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

via email: despacho.fiscal@fiscalia.gov.co
Sr. Fiscal General Néstor Humberto Martínez Neira
Attorney General of Colombia

December 21, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply disturbed by the recent assassinations of two land rights defenders in Afro-descendant territories in Chocó Department: **Mario Castaño Bravo** (November 26) and **Hernán Bedoya** (December 9). They were working to reclaim collective Afro-descendant territories which were stolen by paramilitary groups.

Hernán Bedoya, a land claimant leader of the collective territory of Pedeguita y Mancilla, had been reporting illegal associations, fraudulent contracts, and the presence of paramilitary groups in the region. **Gaitanistas Self-Defense Forces paramilitaries (AGC)** killed him at around 1:15pm on December 9 by shooting him 14 times in the village of Playa Roja, in a place known as El Acopio.

Mario Castaño Bravo, a land claimant leader from Curvaradó, was killed on his own farm on November 26, in the Florida area in La Larga Tumaradó territory in Belén de Bajirá municipality. Unknown individuals entered his home and shot him repeatedly. Mario Castaño Bravo was overseeing the drafting of a collective reparation proposal which included acknowledgment of the communities as legitimate owners of the collective land and limiting company operations without consultation which threaten the life, land and dignity of the inhabitants.

Both leaders had been granted protection measures by the National Protection Unit (Unidad Nacional de Protección, UNP), which only consisted of bulletproof vests and cell phones. Their assassinations demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the protection measures granted by the Colombian government and National Protection Unit.

Mario Castaño Bravo and Hernán Bedoya worked in Humanitarian Zones established by the government in 2006. These are 13 clearly marked zones whose inhabitants request that the parties to the conflict respect their decision not to participate in the conflict. The communities have attempted to defend their right to the land and to stop the expansion of illegal African palm plantations (palm oil) and other economic activity in their territories. Paramilitary groups, however, have moved in and stolen some of their lands, often threatening or killing community residents. Despite repeated orders from the Constitutional Court, the land has not been returned to the communities.

Because of our serious concern about the extreme violence and threats towards the indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in Chocó, **we strongly urge** you to:

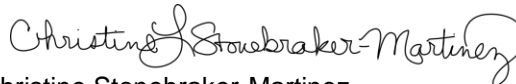
- carry out a thorough and impartial investigation of the killing of Mario Castaño Bravo and Hernán Bedoya, make the results public, and bring those responsible to justice;
- provide a comprehensive state presence in the municipality of Belén de Bajirá which guarantees the right to life, physical integrity and security of the indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples in zones at risk due to the presence of armed groups;
- provide individual and collective protection measures for indigenous and Afro-descendant leaders and human rights defenders, in consultation with them, and in accordance with their wishes;

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

and



Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission ~ via email justiciapaz@justiciapazcolombia.com
Camilo Reyes, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643 and email
Rebecca Daley, Human Rights Officer, US Embassy in Colombia ~ via email
Ryan Reid, Senior Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Dept ~ via email
Christine Russell, Desk Officer for Colombia-human rights affairs, US State Dept ~ via email
José de Jesús Orozco Hernández, Rapporteur for Colombia and for Human Rights Defenders, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur on the Rights of Afro-Descendants and Against Racial Discrimination ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

UA268_17 Colombia

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