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August 23, 2020

Dear Sirs,

We are outraged at the killing of two Nasa Indigenous men, **José Abelardo Liz Cuetia**, age 34, and **José Ernesto Rivera**, on August 13 near Corinto in Cauca Department. The two men were shot and killed during a two-day military and police campaign to forcibly remove members of the Nasa Indigenous group from land that they claim is their ancestral territory. **Julio Cesar Tumbo** and **Leónidas Perdomo** were seriously injured in the attack.

José Abelardo Liz Cuetia, a journalist, hosted a daily news and culture program called *El Sabor de la Tarde* (Afternoon Flavor) on community radio *Nación Nasa* in Corinto. He was recording sound and video of a violent campaign by ESMAD (*Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios*, Mobile Anti-Riot Squad) and army troops to remove Nasa people from seven farms on which they have been living and growing crops since December 2014. The security forces were deployed to fulfill an eviction order by Martha C. Velasco Guzman, mayor of Corinto, which Nasa leaders characterize as “irresponsible and without prior consult.” Legal ownership of the land is claimed by Incauca sugar refinery, a company owned by Carlos Ardila Lülle, one of the wealthiest entrepreneurs in Colombia.


Dora Muñoz, a spokesperson for the Nasa community, said that even though the Nasa community members were unarmed, soldiers “fired indiscriminately,” hitting José Abelardo Liz Cuetia in the chest and José Ernesto Rivera with six bullets to the head, shoulder, and back. She reported that soldiers and ESMAD police blocked medical personnel from arriving. When residents began transporting the injured persons in their own vehicles, soldiers and ESMAD launched tear gas canisters at them. José Abelardo Liz Cuetia died en route to the hospital.

In a widely circulated online video, General Marco Vinicio Mayorga Niño, Commander of the Third Division of the National Army (whose troops were involved in the campaign), denied that the army had targeted civilians. He said that soldiers responded to an attack by “guerrillas” who had infiltrated the Nasa group and that, during the removal operation, several of them fired on his soldiers, tried to kidnap troops, and stole army communications gear.

This attack on August 13 is part of a systematic campaign by the state against the Nasa people that has resulted in the deaths of at least four other Nasa community members since 2017, including 16 year-old Jeferson Tróchez Escue who was beaten to death by ESMAD last year (cf our letter June 24, 2019). **We strongly urge** that you

- conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the killing of José Abelardo Liz Cuetia and José Ernesto Rivera, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- recognize the legal authority of the 22 indigenous authorities within the framework of the special indigenous jurisdiction recognized by Article 246 of the National Constitution
- fulfill the ethnic chapter of the Peace Accords and provisions for comprehensive rural reform

Sincerely,


 Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinators


 Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Francisco Santos Calderón, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via email, US mail
 Antonia Urrejoa, Rapporteur for Colombia and Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Persons, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email, US mail
 Edison Lanza, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email, US mail
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 Cabildo Indígena , Resguardo Indígena Paez de Corinto ~ via email
 ACIN: Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca ~ via email
 ONIC: Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia ~ via email
 US Embassy: Kristen Farrell (human rights) and Mariel Chatman (vulnerable populations) ~ via email
 Christine Russell, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Dept ~ via email
 Natalie Southwick, Program Coordinator, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Central and South America ~ via email
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Gonzalez, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

18 Aug 2020_CPJ_Colombia

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

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