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August 24, 2020

Dear Sirs,

We are gravely concerned about the escalation of attacks on Awá Indigenous communities in Nariño Department. We are particularly disturbed by the assassination attempt against **Francisco Javier Cortés Guanga**, age 42, of the Piguambí Palangala Reservation in La Vaquería sector near the small town of Llorente, in Tumaco municipality. He serves his reservation as human rights spokesperson with UNIPA (Unidad de Pueblos Awá).

At noon on August 11, six men shot at the truck in which Francisco Cortés Guanga and his two security bodyguards from the National Protection Unit (UNP) were riding, en route to meet with the governors of the nearby Awá Indigenous reservation to discuss an electrification project. Unharmed, the three men took refuge in a nearby military battalion.


In the past month, various armed groups operating in the region have sent leaflets threatening Francisco Cortés Guanga and his family. On July 24 his father, **Segundo Jaime Cortés Pai**, governor of Piguambí Palangala Reservation, received threats via the Facebook account of his daughter. These threats came just two weeks after the assassination of the alternate governor of the reservation, **Rodrigo Salazar**, on July 9.

Several armed groups are competing in Nariño for control of land to grow illicit crops, illegal mining, and routes for drug trafficking. In the last four months, at least seven community members and members of the Awá Indigenous Guard have been murdered. On July 28, **Fabio Alfonso Guanga García**, the second Indigenous governor of the Nambí Piedra Verde Reservation (in Barbacoas municipality), and his partner **Sonia Lorena Bisbicus Ortiz** were assassinated. On August 19, **three Awa Indigenous youths** were killed in the remote Aguacuate community of Pialapi Pueblo Viejo Reservation (Ricaurte municipality); it is rumored that other residents of the Reservation have been disappeared.

Because of our concern for the Awá peoples and the persistent presence of armed groups in Nariño, we **strongly urge** that you

- carry out an independent investigation into the killings of Rodrigo Salazar, Fabio Alfonso Guanga García, Sonia Lorena Bisbicus Ortiz, and the three youth; the threats to Segundo Jaime Cortés Pai; and the attempted assassination of Francisco Javier Cortés Guanga; publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- provide protective measures to Francisco Javier Cortés Guanga and his family members, in strict accordance with their wishes
- end all threats, attacks and acts of harassment against Awá Indigenous peoples and their leaders
- publicly acknowledge the persistence of paramilitary structures in Colombia and implement a determined policy to combat their expansion, including effective implementation of the measures in the Peace Accords of 2016

Sincerely,


 Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinators


 Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Francisco Santos Calderón, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via email, US mail
 Carlos Holmes Trujillo, Minister of National Defense ~ via email
 Jhon Alexander Rojas Cabrera, Governor of Nariño Department ~ via email
 Antonia Urrejola Noguera, Rapporteur for Colombia and Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Persons, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email, US mail
 Juliette De Rivero, Representative in Colombia of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ~ via email
 ONIC: Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia ~ via email
 FIDH: International Federation of Human Rights ~ 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
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Gonzalez, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

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

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