

COLOMBIA

Suspects arrested in massacre of 12 Awa people

RRN sent a letter to Colombian officials (9-22-09) calling for a thorough, open, and impartial investigation into the 8-26-09 massacre of 12 indigenous Awa people in Nariño Department, on the Ecuadorean border. The perpetrators were unidentified gunmen wearing masks and military uniforms without insignia. Among those brutally killed while they slept were four children and Tulia García, wife of Gonzalo Rodríguez Guanga, who was killed on May 23, 2009. Since then she had denounced his killing as being carried out by the Colombian Army. She received a series of death threats about which she alerted the authorities.

Under Colombian law, the Awá are a protected people. However, since September 2008 over 50 members of the Awá community in Nariño have been killed by armed actors on all sides: FARC, army, and paramilitaries. A massacre in February 2009 left 27 dead.

Good news: October 2009

After the August massacre, the Colombian government asked the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to help investigate. On October 6, **three men from the FARC rebel group were arrested as suspects.** According to the Colombian Defense Ministry, they were members of Los Cucarachos crime gang, which is involved in drug trafficking, extortion and kidnappings. News outlets reported that FARC guerillas admitted in February 2009 that they killed several indigenous people whom they had accused of collaborating with the Colombian government.