

via fax: 011 57 1 337 58 90/ 342 05 92 Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez President of the Republic de Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 266 0351 Dr. Juan Manuel Santos Arana Minister of Defense, Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 570 2000 ext2017 Dr. Mario German Iguaran Attorney General, Colombia
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September 2, 2008

Dear Sirs:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force, are deeply concerned for the welfare and safety of the following members of the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (Comisión Intereclesial Justicia y Paz, or Justa Paz): **Elizabeth Gomez, Luz Marina Arroyabe, Yimmi Jansasoy, Fabio Ariza, Senaida Parra, Carlos Torres, Andrea Abello, and Eduardo Mina.**

On August 25, this Justa Paz team, working in the Humanitarian Zone of Andalucía Cano Claro in the Curvarado River basin (municipality of Carmen del Darien, Chocó Department), along with community leader Enrique Petro, received a telephoned death threat stating: "with or without the army we are going to kill you."

The threat follows two telephone calls received by Justa Paz on August 24. The first call was to the team in Andalucía Cano Claro, from a woman claiming to be from the Black Eagles (Águilas Negras) paramilitary group: "...you are being watched, you need to leave right now." The second threat, received from the same telephone number, was made to the Justa Paz office in Bogotá. The caller instructed: "take these people out of the area at once."

Justa Paz has been supporting the cause of the Afro-descendant communities living in the Curvarado and Jiguamiando River Basins in the department of Chocó where paramilitaries have occupied some of their lands and have attempted to force them to grow plantations of African Palm, a cash crop used in products ranging from cooking oil to soap. We have written at least two previous letters to Colombian officials regarding concern for the safety of Justa Paz in this region (April 14 and November 14, 2005). The latest threats have occurred in the context of Afro-descendant communities' efforts to protect their collective land rights and to prevent the expansion of African Palm plantations within their territory.

The government backs the armed operations through the Ministry of Agriculture, which has given territory to Palm Oil businesses so they can continue the illegal planting of African palm in the collective territory. These plantings began in 2005 after 13 forced displacements, 111 assassinations and forced disappearances carried out by military, police and paramilitary forces.

As a result of our concern for the safety of Justa Paz and members of the Afro-descendant communities of this area, we strongly urge that you

- guarantee the safety of Elizabeth Gomez, Luz Marina Arroyabe, Yimmi Jansasoy, Fabio Ariza, Senaida Parra, Carlos Torres, Andrea Abello, Eduardo Mina and community leader Enrique Petro and that of other members of the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (Justa Paz);
- order a full and impartial investigation into the threats described above and publish the results;
- take appropriate steps to ensure that Justa Paz can carry out its legitimate and important work for the defense of human rights.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

cc: Justicia y Paz Intereclesial ~ via US mail
 Carolina Barco Isakson, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
 William Brownfield, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011.571.315.2197
 Heather Merritt, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.4173
 Javier Hernández Valencia, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Colombia office ~ via fax: 011-571. 658-3300
 Paolo Carozza, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 US Senators Brown & Voinovich and US Representatives Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Regula, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

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