

via fax: 011 57 1 337 58 90/ 342 05 92 Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez President of the Republic of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 266 0414 Juan Manuel Santos Calderon Minister of Defense, Colombia
via fax: 011 57 1 570 2000 ext. 2017 Dr. Mario German Iguaran Attorney General, Colombia	

October 26, 2008

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply concerned for the welfare and safety of members of the **indigenous communities of Colombia, especially those in the Cauca Department**. Reports from Colombia indicate at least 19 indigenous people killed leading up to the current peace march, one killed as part of the march, 110 injured and at least eight families displaced when security forces occupied their homes.

On October 12, thousands of indigenous activists gathered for a protest in northern Cauca Department as part of a nationwide day of indigenous gatherings to commemorate what we in the United States call "Columbus Day." As the protests and accompanying road blockages entered a second day, the Colombian government began responding violently. On October 15 at 5:30 AM in La María in the municipality of Piendamó, Cauca Department, the Army, Police and the Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron (ESMAD) violently evicted the indigenous activists who had been peacefully waiting in La María for the government to meet with them. The Cauca Regional Indigenous Council (CRIC) reported that these Colombian security forces indiscriminately fired into a crowd of at least 12,000 who were blocking a road, **wounding at least thirty-five people; at least one man has since died**. CRIC also reports that the **ESMAD killed an indigenous person** with a machete. In addition, the forces burned personal and communal property and destroyed the health office and medical materials and blocked ambulances from arriving. Fleeing protesters reported that they were then pursued by the military with long-range weapons.

On October 21, various indigenous groups gathered in La Maria to begin a peaceful march from northern Cauca to Cali, 60 km away along the Pan American Highway. Thousands of indigenous people (mostly Embera Chami and Katios) from other departments near Cali joined the march, also demanding that the government sit down and negotiate. In a positive development on October 25, a high-level US Embassy official traveled to Cauca with the United Nations to investigate the situation. President Uribe has agreed to negotiate with indigenous leaders.

Because of our concern for the safety of Indigenous people of Colombia, we strongly urge that you:

- guarantee the safety of **all** protesters, including the Indigenous, according to the Colombian Constitution;
- order a full and impartial investigation into the shootings in Cauca, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- immediately produce policy and plans to guarantee the safety of all Indigenous peoples of Colombia, according to the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and make these plans public.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Coordinator

cc: 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
 Susan Sanford, 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 ~ via email
 US Representatives Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Regula, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

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