

Via Fax: 011 57 1 565 7682 Dr. Francisco Santos Calderon Vice-President of Colombia	Fax: 011 57 1 570 2000 Dr. Mario German Iguaran Arana Attorney General of Colombia
Via Fax: 001 57 1 560 46 30 Dr. Fabio Valencia Cossio Minister for the Interior and Justice of Colombia	

June 23, 2009

Dear Sirs:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force, are extremely concerned for the safety of the more than 100 residents of Caracoli in the Curvarado region of Chocó Department. On June 11 they learned that local police were preparing an eviction notice to be served on June 18. This eviction notice had been ordered by a local judge despite the central government's repeated recognition that the residents of Caracoli legally own their lands and therefore have a right to remain there. The Ministry for the Interior and Justice has recently called on the regional judicial authorities to respect the validity of this land title.

Residents of the Curvarado and neighboring Jiguamiando river basins were driven off their land in 1997 by paramilitary forces who have since killed over 100 members of these communities, leaving the land available for illegal plantations of African palm. After the national government recognized the communities' collective land title, residents of Caracoli returned to the area in 2007. They have faced repeated attempts by African palm growers to falsify title deeds to the land to drive them off again. They have been repeatedly labeled guerrillas and have been threatened by paramilitary groups. On May 26 a well-known local paramilitary threatened to kill **Enrique Petro** and **Elías López**, two members of the Andalucia community in the Curvarado river basin, who have been opposing the illegal occupation of their lands. They had previously faced a series of threats in 2008 about which we wrote to you on Sept. 2, 2008.

We **strongly urge** you to:

- avoid forcible eviction of the residents of Caracoli;
- ensure that the collective land title owned by the Afro-descendant communities in the Curvarado/Jiguamiando region is respected;
- guarantee the safety of members of the Afro-descendant communities living in the Curvarado/Jiguamiando region;
- order a full, independent and impartial investigation into the threats against Enrique Petro and Elias Lopez and publish the results;
- adhere to your obligations to human rights defenders as laid out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the Organization of American States Human Rights Defenders in the Americas resolutions and in repeated recommendations made by the UN;
- take decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups and investigate and break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations.

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
Nan N. Fife, 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 Bocchieri, Fudge, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Ryan, Space, Sutton, Wilson ~ via email

UA 154/09-COLOMBIA

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