

via fax: 011-571-570-2000 (ext 2017)

Sr. Guillermo Mendoza Diago
 Attorney General of Colombia

September 26, 2009

Dear Sir:

We are profoundly concerned for the welfare and safety of **church community leaders in Córdoba Department** who are leaders in land-rights struggles and in opposition to the violence affecting their communities. CEDECOL, the Council of Evangelical and Protestant Churches in Colombia, has documented more than 20 human rights violations in Córdoba this year, including threats, assassinations and forced displacement by right-wing paramilitaries and left-wing rebels. Last year there were six massacres among 512 violent deaths, the highest murder rate in Córdoba in the past 18 years.

On September 6 at 10:00 p.m. three hooded presumed paramilitaries shot and killed Foursquare Church Pastor **Rafael Velásquez** at his home. His wife and six young people from the church were present at the time of his murder.

On July 24 at 11:20 a.m in Santa Marta community, the location of paramilitary demobilization talks with the government, four presumed Black Eagles paramilitaries shot and killed **Marco Fidel Suárez Moreno**, married with four children, ages 11 to 22. He was a city council member in Montería, a community arbitration provider, and a leader at the Galacia (AIEC) Church.

On June 28, at 8:00 p.m. four armed men, presumed members of the paramilitary organization the Self Defense Gaitanistas of Colombia, killed **Jhon Jairo Martínez** at his house in Montería. He was a leader in the AIEC church, married with three children, ages two to nine.

These victims are among six protestant church leaders and more community leaders who have been killed by presumed rearmed paramilitaries. There have also been several attempted murders and many death threats which have caused the forced displacement of hundreds of people. In one town six pastors were threatened with death if they failed to make extortion payments.

We are also concerned about the ongoing collusion between rearmed paramilitary groups and Colombian public security forces, as well as the lack of response from state agencies to this violence. In recent conversations with human rights workers, pastors and community leaders spoke of their deep fear about reporting paramilitary operations that have intensified in the past five months. According to one pastor, "If the [state agents and paramilitary groups] knew what we were telling you, as soon as we left this meeting we'd be shot."

Therefore we **strongly urge** that you:

- immediately order full and impartial investigations into these cases, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- ensure the protection and reparation for the victims of these crimes and their families;
- take whatever decisive action is necessary, in light of the danger and importance of their work, to guarantee the safety and protection of all persons living in this region who demand the rights to their land.

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
 Nan N. Fife, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.4173
 Paolo Carozza, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 Javier Hernández Valencia, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Colombia office ~ via fax: 011-571. 658-3300
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 Pablo Moreno, National Coordinator, CEDECOL Peace Commission ~ via email
 Felix Ortiz-Cotto, Area Executive, Global Ministries of UCC & Disciples of Christ ~ via fax: 1-317-635-4323
 U.S. Senators Brown and Voinovich and U.S. Representatives Bocchieri, Fudge, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Ryan, Space, Sutton, Wilson ~ via email

UCC/9/26Colombia

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