

via fax: 011 57 337 5890 <b>Sr. Juan Manuel Santos</b> President of the Republic of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 599 8961 <b>Sr. German Vargas Lleras</b> Minister of the Interior and Justice, Colombia
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November 24, 2010

Dear Sirs:

We are gravely concerned for the lives of human rights activists in trade unions and organizations of Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples in southwestern Colombia who have received death threats. On October 30, human rights defenders in Bogotá and in the departments of Valle del Cauca, Cauca and Narino, received the same text message from the paramilitary group Black Eagles telling them: "go to Venezuela if you want a new country...leave or die". Approximately 25 individuals and groups were threatened, including the Black Communities Process (PCN), Cauca Indigenous Regional Council (CRIC), and Trade Union Congress (CUT).

Also threatened were leaders of Afro-descendant and indigenous communities, including Cerro Tijeras-La Toma, and others in northern Cauca who have opposed the development of gold mines or large-scale hydroelectric projects. The threat accused the organizations and individuals it named of "giving wrong information to the communities, organizing demonstrations, and creating problems of law and order such as the Peoples' Congress from the 8th to the 12th October." The People's Congress, held in Bogotá, had more than 17,000 delegates representing 220 organizations. The main themes of the Congress included the defense of their territory, their natural resources, the environment, and the right to lead a life with dignity.

On October 10, the Black Eagles sent an email to several key human rights defenders naming over 69 Colombian NGOs and individuals, telling them to "assume they will be dead." On October 13, **Luz Nery Ramirez Mosquera**, member of the National Association of displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES) in northern Colombia, one of the organizations named, survived an apparent attempt on her life by two gunmen who are members of the security forces.

These threats, which are the latest in a series of killings and death threats in recent years against Afro-descendant and indigenous communities in southwestern Colombia, are clear evidence that paramilitary groups are still operating even though they were supposedly demobilized in a government-sponsored process that began in 2003.

**Therefore, we urge that you take immediate and decisive action to:**

- order a full and impartial investigation into the death threats against members of PCN, CRIC and CUT; publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- provide protection for those threatened, in agreement with their wishes;
- dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

cc: AFRODES ~ via US mail  
 PCN ~ via US mail  
 Gabriel Silva, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643  
 William Brownfield, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011.571.315.2197  
 Terry Steers-Gonzalez, Senior Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.2628  
 Dinah Shelton, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3650  
 Rodrigo Escobar Gil, Colombia member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3650  
 US Senators Brown & Voinovich and US Representatives Bocchieri, Fudge, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Ryan, Space, Sutton, Wilson ~ via email  
 UA237/10/Colombia

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