

via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631 <b>Señor Presidente Juan Manuel Santos</b> President of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 599 8961 <b>Señor German Vargas Lleras</b> Minister of Interior and Justice, Colombia
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April 1, 2011

Dear Sirs:

We urge you to take appropriate measures to **guarantee the safety of 123 families who plan to return to their land in Las Pavas**, located in the township (*corregimiento*) of Buenos Aires in the El Peñón municipal jurisdiction in the southern region of Bolívar Department.

In 1997, these peasant families, who constitute the Buenos Aires Peasant Organization (ASOCAB), first established themselves on the Las Pavas land, which had been abandoned since 1992, and began farming. At various times, paramilitary groups tried to intimidate and forcefully displace them. In 2006, ASOCAB began the legal process of obtaining title to the land, which had been abandoned by its previous owner, alleged drug trafficker Jesús Emilio Escobar Fernández. Even though this process was under way, El Labrador Consortium bought the land in 2007. In January 2009, these companies (involved in palm oil production and suppliers for UK-based The Body Shop), solicited the police to evict these families. After bribing a judge to obtain an eviction notice, members of the National Police and mobile riot police squad evicted the families on July 14, 2009.

The community has filed administrative and legal recourses to demand that their land be returned to them so that they might support their families. After waiting 19 months for this to be resolved—and enduring harassment and threats during this interim—the families have decided to take the bold step of reestablishing themselves on the land.

**We strongly urge that you guarantee a peaceful return to their land:**

1. Instruct law enforcement to abstain from using indiscriminate force against the families, protect them from any use of force by third parties or in the name of other parties interested in said lands.
2. Take steps to facilitate the families' access to adequate food during and after the return process. Give priority to using the lands to feed themselves. Use food assistance only as a subsidiary means when the families cannot harvest enough food to feed themselves. Measures of this nature would be in accordance with General Comment no. 12 of the UN ESCR Committee.
3. Order an investigation into the harassment of community members and take steps to stop this harassment.
4. Take the necessary steps to legalize ASOCAB's ownership of the land.
5. Guarantee the community's access to effective legal mechanisms that allow them to obtain restitution of their rights and indemnity for the damages suffered due to displacement.
6. Establish a system to follow up on the community's situation and avoid future evictions occur.

We appreciate your time and attention. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Coordinator

cc: Gabriel Silva Luján, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643  
 P. Michael McKinley, US Ambassador to Colombia ~via fax: 011.571.315.0811  
 Terry Steers-Gonzalez, Senior Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.4173  
 Dinah Shelton, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992  
 Rodrigo Escobar Gil, Colombia member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992  
 US Senators Brown and Portman ~ via email  
 US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Renacci, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

Mar 23 CPT-Colombia

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