

Via Fax: 011 57 1 596 0631
Sr. Presidente Juan Manuel Santos
 President of Colombia

Via Fax: 011 57 1 599 8961
Sr. German Vargas Lleras
 Minister of Interior and Justice of Colombia

June 9, 2011

Dear Sirs:

We are very concerned about attacks and threats against **Danilo Rueda** and **Gisela Cañas**, members of the non-governmental human rights organization Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission.

On May 13, Danilo Rueda's home in Bogotá was broken into, his books thrown on the floor, folders opened, his computer running and two USB memory sticks stolen. The memory sticks included information about the joint military and paramilitary operation "Génesis," in February 1997, which resulted in the killing and enforced disappearance of many civilians. The NGO's office in Curvaradó, Chocó Department, was also broken-into at the end of March.

The Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission works with Afro-descendant and indigenous communities living in and around the Curvaradó, Jiguamiandó and Cacarica River Basins in Chocó, supporting them in their land dispute struggles with mining companies and paramilitaries. On April 18, a former community council member accused Danilo Rueda and the NGO of being guerrillas and of trying to get the land for themselves. The accuser is reportedly linked to a former military commander, retired General Rito Alejo del Río, who has also repeatedly accused the NGO members of being guerrillas. Rito Alejo del Río is under criminal investigation for coordinating joint paramilitary and military strategies, including operation "Génesis." The existence of these operations was confirmed by former paramilitaries in court hearings on May 11 and 12.

On April 1 **Gisela Cañas**, a lawyer with the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission who is working with indigenous communities in Putumayo Department and the lower Atrato area of Chocó Department, received a text message death threat: "Listen Gisela ...we know where you are and we will kill you for defending foolish things, we give you 48 hours to leave the country."

These incidents are further examples of attacks over several years on members of the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (cf our most recent letters of 5/13/10 and 10/2/10).

Therefore, we are **strongly urging** that you

- take all possible measures to protect Danilo Rueda, Gisela Cañas and other members of the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, in strict accordance with their wishes;
- order a full and impartial investigation into break-ins of Danila Rueda's home and the Curvaradó office of the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, as well as death threats against Gisela Cañas, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- state publicly that raids on the offices of civil society organizations will not be tolerated;

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

CC: Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission ~ via US mail
 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 and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Renacci, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

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