

via fax: 011 57 1 599 0631

**Sr. Presidente Juan Manuel Santos**  
President of Colombia

via fax: 011 57 1 599 8961

**German Vargas Lleras**  
Minister of the Interior of Colombia

October 26, 2011

Dear Sirs:

We are outraged at the murder of **José Reinel Restrepo**, the parish priest of the municipality of Marmato, Caldas Department, who was a defender of the rights of people to remain in their territory. On September 2 his body, without any identification, was found next to his motorcycle on which he had been traveling between Mistrató and Belén de Umbría, Risaralda Department. We believe that the media report of a supposed mugging being the cause of his death could be a cover-up for his assassination because of his work in defense of the people.

The week before his death, Father Restrepo and municipal leaders had visited Bogotá to denounce the proposed large-scale open-pit gold mining project of the Canadian mining company Medoro Resources (now merged with Gran Colombia Gold), which would uproot the community and violate the rights of the afro-descendant, indigenous and mestizo populations. Plans have also been announced to relocate the urban center that includes the parish church. To alleviate community confusion about its potential location, Father Restrepo contacted the church authorities of Caldas who denied that any sale had been made.

The State has indicated that it will not carry out a process of prior consultation about the mine; this is a violation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the ILO Convention 169 that Colombia ratified in Law 21 of 1991. An increased presence of public armed forces in the Marmato area is also adding to the intimidation of the community.

Because of our deep concern for the rights of the people of this region, and because they deserve to know the true cause of the death of Father Restrepo, we **strongly urge** that you

- ✓ carry out an immediate and complete investigation into the cause of Farther Restrepo's death, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- ✓ guarantee that the rights of communities and their organizations, including those of expression and participation, are respected in relationship to the development of mega-projects;
- ✓ guarantee the right of the population to remain in the urban area in which they have ancestrally lived;
- ✓ guarantee that the church, a place of worship for the Catholic population, remains where it is.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Coordinator

cc: José Alvear Restrepo Lawyer's Collective – via fax: 011 (571) 2824270  
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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 & Portman ~ via email  
US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Renacci, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

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