

via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631 Sr. Juan Manuel Santos President of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 286 2649 Sr. Juan Camilo Restrepo Minister of Agriculture, Colombia
via fax: 011 57 1 570 2000 ext 2020 Sr. Eduardo Montealegre Attorney General, Colombia	

May 1, 2012

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply saddened and outraged at the killing of **Manuel Ruiz**, a member of the Community Council of Apartadocito, in the Curvaradó River Basin, Chocó Department, and his 15-year-old son, **Samir de Jesús Ruiz**. On March 23, paramilitaries stopped them as they traveled between Mutatá in Antioquia Department and Apartadocito. Manuel Ruiz telephoned his family to tell them they had been forced out of their vehicle and that their abductors were demanding a large sum of money for their release. On March 24 a paramilitary informed his family that Manuel and his son had been killed that morning. Over the next few days, members of the communities of the Curvaradó River Basin, accompanied by international observers, found the body of Manuel Ruiz in the Río Sucio area (March 27) and of Samir de Jesús Ruiz near the river in the Cañaduzales area (March 28).

The family of Manuel Ruiz and other members of the Afro-descendant and Afro-mestizo community of Apartadocito were displaced in 1996 from an area known as Los Piscingos. The killings described above occurred just before Manuel Ruiz was to guide government representatives in a scheduled inspection of Los Piscingos. The inspection was a response to a March 7 court order requiring a census to help determine the rightful owners of land.

This is just the latest atrocity in the systematic attacks against communities in the Curvaradó River Basin. Many community residents have been threatened by paramilitaries because of their stance in defense of their land rights and against palm oil companies. We have written at least ten letters to Colombian officials since 2005 urging protection for those being threatened and investigations into two assassinations and two forced disappearances (cf our letter of August 15, 2011).

Fearing for their safety following the abduction and killing, the family of Manuel Ruiz and his son has left Apartadocito. Because we believe that other members of their family and community may be in danger, we **strongly urge** that you

- launch a full and impartial investigation into the murders of Manuel Ruiz and Samir de Jesús Ruiz, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice;
- guarantee the safety of the family of Manuel Ruiz and other members of the communities of the Curvaradó River Basin;
- take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with security forces, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the United Nations.

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: 011.571.315.2197
 Terry Steers-Gonzalez, Senior Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.4173
 Dinah Shelton, Chair, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 Rodrigo Escobar Gil, Second Vice-Chair, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 US Senators Brown & 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: