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| via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631 Excmo Sr. Juan Manuel Santos President of the Republic of Colombia | via fax: 011 57 1 266 1003 Sr. Juan Carlos Pinzón Minister of Defense of Colombia |
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January 25, 2013

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely concerned for the safety of **Ligia María Chaverra** and **Enrique Petro**, Afro-descendant community leaders in the Curvaradó and Jiguamiando River Basin, Chocó Department. On January 15 seven men on motorbikes came looking for community leader Enrique Petro in the nearby Humanitarian Zone of Andalucia. When Enrique Petro informed members of the armed forces about this, they said the men lived nearby but they did not know their identities. Local residents also said they did not know any of the men. On January 22 two men, thought to be paramilitaries, arrived on motorbikes in the Humanitarian Zone of Las Camelias in El Carmen del Darién Municipality, Chocó Department, looking for an Afro-descendant community leader saying, "We need to speak with her and just her." In recent months, paramilitaries have declared Ligia María Chaverra and 40 other local community leaders to be military targets and stated their intention to kill them.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights of the Organization of American States has issued provisional protection measures on behalf of Enrique Petro and María Ligia Chaverra and has repeatedly called for appropriate measures to guarantee the safety of members of the Afro-descendant communities of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó. However, authorities have failed to take effective action to implement the Court's requests.

In December 2012, a report by the Colombian Institute for Rural Development identified business people who were illegally exploiting the land that is part of the collective territory of the Afro-descendant communities. In a new judicial ruling (Auto 299 of 18 December 2012), the Constitutional Court established a timeframe and criteria that the government should follow to ensure the return of lands to the Afro-descendant communities that had been misappropriated by agro-industrial business interests. In the past, death threats and serious human rights violations have coincided with attempts by State authorities to implement court and other orders to ensure the return of these lands.

In December 2012, Enrique Petro testified in Medellín against the African palm plantation businesses that are illegally occupying territory of the Afro-descendant communities. Paramilitaries and palm plantation workers have threatened him saying that they knew he testified against them.

Despite the strong army presence in the region, there have been repeated reports of paramilitaries present in the area. Concerns for the safety of Enrique Petro have been heightened because, since January 15, soldiers positioned on the perimeter of the Humanitarian Zone of Andalucia were withdrawn.

Therefore, we **strongly urge** that you

- provide effective protection for Ligia María Chaverra and Enrique Petro, in accordance with their wishes;
- order a full and impartial investigation into recent paramilitary threats to kill Ligia María Chaverra, Enrique Petro and 40 community leaders, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

Copies: Comisión Interrelcesial de Justicia y Paz ~ via U.S. Mail
 Gabriel Silva Luján, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
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 José de Jesús Orozco Henríquez, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

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