

via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631 Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos President of the Republic of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 381 4742 Sra. Ministra María Ángela Holguín Minister of Foreign Affairs of Colombia
---	--

March 5, 2013

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely concerned for the safety of **Father Alberto Franco**, Executive Secretary of the human rights NGO Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP); CIJP National Coordinator **Danilo Rueda**, CIJP member **Abilio Peña**; and human rights defender **Father Javier Giraldo** of the Center for Investigation and Popular Education (CNEP).

On February 13 Father Franco's empty car was hit by three bullets. The attack was possibly an attempt to test the level of protective plating in the armored vehicle that he used as part of a government protection program, directed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). He had recently been followed and his home and office had been watched. The attack coincided with the hearing of the case "Operation Genesis," a joint military and paramilitary operation which resulted in the killing and forced disappearance of many civilians. CIJP has provided key evidence for this case. Hours before the hearing, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights received an open letter accusing CIJP of links to guerrillas. The letter made false accusations against CIJP National Coordinator Danilo Rueda, CIJP member Abilio Peña and Father Javier Giraldo.

The Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission has supported efforts by Afro-descendant and indigenous communities in and around the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins to reclaim their lands. In these areas, paramilitaries have occupied the land of some Afro-descendant communities and have attempted to force them to grow African Palm, a cash crop used in products ranging from cooking oil to soap. Powerful mining interests are also trying to develop operations in these areas.

We believe the actions described above are directly motivated by CJIP's legitimate work to expose human rights violation. There we **strongly urge** you to

- institute an independent and thorough investigation into the attacks and previous threats described above and bring those responsible to justice;
- take immediate steps to provide appropriate protection to those who request it, in strict accordance with their wishes;
- guarantee that all human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate work without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Coordinator

Copies: Inter-church Justice and Peace Commission ~ vial email
 Gabriel Silva Luján, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
 P. Michael McKinley, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011.571.275.4600
 Mary Brett Rogers-Springs, Senior Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.2628
 José de Jesús Orozco Henríquez, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email
 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: