

# IRTF

## InterReligious Task Force on Central America

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| via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631<br><b>Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos</b><br>President of the Republic of Colombia           | via fax: 011 57 1 266 1003<br><b>Sr. Juan Carlos Pinzón</b><br>Minister of Defense of Colombia |
| via fax: 011 57 1 286 2649<br><b>Sr. Francisco Estupiñán Heredia</b><br>Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development |  |

July 12, 2013

Dear Sirs:

We are gravely concerned for the safety of **thousands of peasant farmers in the Catatumbo area in North Santander Department**. Since June 11 they have been involved in protests led by the Peasant Farmer Association of Catatumbo (ASCAMCAT), demanding the implementation of a Peasant Farmer Reservation Zone, agreed to by the Colombian Institute for Rural Development (INCODER). Two protesters were fatally injured on June 22, and two more were killed on June 25. Dozens have been injured and some protesters have been arrested.

Government authorities have sought to undermine the protests by claiming that guerrilla forces have infiltrated the demonstrations. On June 21, at a ceremony for police officials, President Santos claimed that the protest had been infiltrated by the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC). On June 24 this claim was repeated by the national police director in charge of public safety. These claims were followed by the fatal injuries. There is concern that such accusations may encourage the anti-riot police (ESMAD), the security forces and the armed forces to employ excessive force against demonstrators.

We **strongly urge** that you

- order full and impartial investigations by the civilian justice system into the deaths of at least four protesters and the injuries of many others;
- establish whether these deaths and injuries were the result of excessive use of force by the security forces, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-coordinator

cc: Gabriel Silva Luján, Colombian Ambassador to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643  
P. Michael McKinley, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011.571.275.4600  
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

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