

via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631 Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos President of the Republic of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 5 339 9800 Estimada Sra. Elsa Noguera Mayor of Barranquilla, Atlántico Department, Colombia
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April 15, 2014

Dear President Santos and Mayor Noguera:

We are deeply concerned for the safety of **Juan Martínez**, a leader of the Association of Land Workers (ASOTRACAMPO) in Barranquilla, Atlántico Department. On March 25 he was threatened by a woman from an armed group, believed to be paramilitaries: "until today you are alive Juancito, we already have the people to kill you."

Since 2001, 130 families have been living on and farming the El Tamarindo farm near Barranquilla, which had previously been abandoned. These families went to El Tamarindo from other areas because they had been forcibly displaced by the armed conflict. Since then there have been repeated attempts to force them off the land. In 2007 the state announced that a Free Trade Zone, including the territory of the farm, would be created. In 2008 a local business began legal proceedings to seek legal title to the land. In 2013 there were forced evictions of some families over the course of four months.

A group of armed men living in the area, suspected to be paramilitaries linked to local business interests, has repeatedly threatened to kill peasant farmers at El Tamarindo. On October 30, 2013 the families were declared military targets by the paramilitary group Rastrojos Urban Commands-Barranquilla. Between November 9, 2013 and March 10, 2014 members of the II Brigade of the Military Police set up a post on the El Tamarindo farm. Local witnesses have seen the military police on joint patrols with the armed men who are suspected to be paramilitaries.

ASOTRACAMPO represents some of the families living in El Tamarindo. Other volatile incidents led up to the threat against ASOTRACAMPO member Juan Martínez on March 25:

- March 21: 43 families of the El Tamarindo farm were forcibly evicted from the Campo Natasha area following an order from the mayor of Barranquilla.
- March 22: 15 men armed with machetes, suspected to be paramilitaries, blocked the exit road of El Tamarindo farm. They stopped a car, beat the driver (ASOTRACAMPO member **Ranail Marmolejo**), and tried to drag Juan Martínez out of the car. Later that day, one of the armed men threatened to burn the houses of the peasant farmers.

We are concerned for the safety of these families and strongly urge that you:

- guarantee the safety of the families at El Tamarindo as they continue to campaign for the recognition of their rights to the El Tamarindo land;
- order full and impartial investigations into the attack on Ranail Marmolejo and threats to Juan Martínez by the armed men, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Co-Coordinator

copies: MOVICE-Atlántico ~ via US mail
 Luis Carlos Villegas, Ambassador of Colombia to the US ~ via email
 Andrew Bowen, Interim Deputy Chief of Mission, US Embassy to Colombia ~ via fax: 011.571.275.4600
 Olivia Franken, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.2628
 José de Jesus Orozco Hernández, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via fax

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