

PUBLIC

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UA 340/08 Fear for safety/ Death threats

COLOMBIA **Julio Mecheche Manyoma (m)**
Aquileito Mecheche Barahona (m)
Milciades Chamorro Marmolejo (m)
Herminio Lana Guaseruca (m)
Diomedes Rubiano (m)
Eleciana Chajito (f)
Iris Nayibi Cabrera (f)
Morelia Marmolejo (f)

Members of the Embera Indigenous community of the Bajo Atrato Indigenous reservation in the municipality of Riosucio, Chocó Department

A group of Indigenous leaders and some of their female companions, all members of the Embera Indigenous community, have received a death threat stating that they will be killed on 24 December.

On 6 December, a written death threat was received by Indigenous leaders in the municipality of Riosucio, Department of Chocó. The threat listed the names of Julio Mecheche Manyoma, Aquileito Mecheche Barahona, Milciades Chamorro Marmolejo, Herminio Lana Guaseruca, Diomedes Rubiano, Eleciana Chajito, Iris Nayibi Cabrera and Morelia Marmolejo, and said that all of them would be “eliminated” on 24 December.

The Embera Indigenous men who were threatened are or have been leaders of the Bajo Atrato Indigenous reservation in Riosucio. Some of the men’s female companions were also listed.

The leaders have talked publicly about previous attacks on the Bajo Atrato Indigenous reservation. These attacks have been perpetrated by all parties involved in Colombia's internal armed conflict, including the security forces, paramilitary groups and guerrilla forces. The leaders' work has also included the defence and promotion of the Indigenous community's land rights, as the area is rich in natural resources, including minerals and oil, and is therefore in demand for the implementation of large-scale economic projects by private and public companies.

This is not the only threat that members of the community have received recently. On 18 November, four armed men with hoods forced their way into a house in Riosucio. At the time, three of Julio Macheche Manyoma and Aquileito Mecheche Barahona’s young female relatives were in the house. The intruders asked where they could find the two men. When the girls did not reply, the intruders threatened to kidnap one of them if they did not divulge the whereabouts of the two men. The intruders left without kidnapping or harming the girls, but community members report that since then, the homes of Julio Macheche Manyoma and Aquileito Mecheche Barahona have been under surveillance.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Indigenous Peoples, campesino communities (rural small-scale farming communities) and Afro-descendant communities are among the groups of civilians most affected by the long-running internal conflict in Colombia. These communities are often located in areas of intense military conflict, as the land on which these communities live is in many cases rich in minerals and oil. At particular risk of attack are those

communities living in areas earmarked for large-scale economic projects, such as mineral and oil exploitation, agro-industry developments or hydro-electric schemes.

These communities are often attacked by all sides in the Colombian conflict, often displacing them from lands which are subsequently opened up for large-scale economic development. Those communities that campaign against such economic development are also often attacked by the security forces and paramilitaries, who repeatedly label these communities as "subversive". These accusations are often followed by paramilitary attacks. Guerrilla groups also threaten and kill members of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities they accuse of siding with "the enemy".

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Spanish or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to take effective action to protect those named above, who have been threatened that they will be killed on 24 December, and all members of the Embera Indigenous community in Riosucio, Chocó Department, as deemed appropriate by those under threat themselves;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into the threats, for the results to be made public and those responsible brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

APPEALS TO:

President

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 337 5890

Salutation: Dear President Uribe/Excmo. Sr. Presidente Uribe

Minister of Interior and Justice

Señor Ministro Carlos Holguín Sardi

Ministro del Interior y Justicia, Ministerio del Interior y de Justicia, Carrera 9a. No. 14-10, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 560 46 30

Salutation: Dear Minister/ Estimado Sr. Ministro

National Ombudsman for indigenous and ethnic groups

Señor Defensor Delegado Horacio Guerrero García

Defensor Delegado para los indígenas y grupos étnicos, Defensoría del Pueblo

Calle 55, No. 10-32, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +571 691 52 55

Salutation: Dear Mr. Guerrero/ Estimado Sr. Defensor Delegado

COPIES TO:

National Indigenous organization

Organización nacional indígena de Colombia (ONIC)

Calle 13, N°4-38

Bogotá, Colombia

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.