

URGENT ACTION

PARAMILITARY INVASION OF HUMANITARIAN ZONES

Inhabitants of the Jiguamiandó river basin have reported the presence of paramilitary groups in their territory. The increase in paramilitary activity in these humanitarian zones is putting the Indigenous and Afro-Colombian residents at risk.

On 15 March the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz, CIJP), a human rights NGO, reported the presence of 40 individuals belonging to the Gaitanista Self Defence Forces of Colombia in the Santa Rosa farm in the department of Chocó, in north-western Colombia. According to the NGO these individuals occupied the farm for two days. Since 8 March the CIJP has reported that paramilitary groups have harassed the **communities of the Jiguamiandó river basin**, intimidating them with their presence, threatening their leaders and reasserting their intentions to take control of the territory. Despite the fact that the humanitarian zones of the Urada Jiguamiandó reservation, Pueblo Nuevo and Nueva Esperanza have been granted protectionary measures by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Constitutional Court of Colombia, the situation has not changed and has worsened since the beginning of March.

The presence of the paramilitaries was reported by inhabitants of the humanitarian reservation, who notified the CIJP that, to date, they are surrounded by members of this illegal armed group in the areas of La Mina, La Selva, El Tamboral, El Chorro, Canalón, La Dominga and the Abracharia farm, near the Jiguamiandó river basin. According to information received by Amnesty International, the Afro-Colombian residents of the humanitarian zones of Pueblo Nuevo and Nueva Esperanza have also reported this situation to the Ombudsperson but have confirmed that they are still awaiting a response from the state, warning of the risk of collective displacements. The residents report that the state's absence has allowed the movement of armed groups within their territory. Since 8 March, leaders from the territory have reported to the CIJP that they have received threats from these paramilitary groups. The Indigenous leader **Argemiro Bailarín**, member of the Local Council (Cabildo Mayor) of the Urada Jiguamiandó Embera reservation, received information in relation to a plan to assassinate him due to his work as a defender of collective territory. In addition, other leaders of humanitarian zones such as **Manuel Denis Blandón**, **Melkin Romaña**, **Erasmo Sierra** and **Benjamín Sierra** have also been threatened and fear for their integrity.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Calling for a comprehensive response from the state to the reports from the communities of the Jiguamiandó river basin, ensuring that the boundaries of the humanitarian zones are respected, guaranteeing the safety of their residents and demanding that the presence of the authorities is strengthened at access points to the river;
- Insisting that humanitarian zones must be respected and ensuring the safety of the leaders, in compliance with the provisions established in relation to victims in the Peace Agreement with the FARC, ensuring that acts of violence are not repeated in their communities and respecting their human rights;
- Urging the authorities to take immediate action to break up paramilitary groups, in accordance with the commitments made by the government and recommendations from International Organizations

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 MAY 2017 TO:

President

Juan Manuel Santos
President of Colombia
Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26
Bogotá, Colombia
Email: contacto@presidencia.gov.co

Salutation: Dear President

Ombudsperson

Carlos Alfonso Negret
Carrera 9 Núm.16 - 21
Bogotá D. C., Colombia
Email: asuntosdefensor@defensoria.gov.co

Salutation: Dear Ombudsman

And copies to:

Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission

Carrera 37A Núm. 25B-42
Bogotá D. C., Colombia
Fax: +57 1 268 717

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission works together with Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities living in the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó river basins in the process to reclaim their territory. In these zones, paramilitaries have occupied the land of some Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities since 2005.

In recent years, many of the people who fled their land after being violently displaced by the paramilitary and security forces at the end of the 1990s have returned to the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó river basin communities. The communities have attempted to defend their right to the land and to stop the expansion of illegal African palm plantations and other economic activity in their territory. As a result, many members of the communities have been threatened or murdered. Despite repeated orders from the Constitutional Court, the land has not been returned to the communities.

In April 2006 the first of many different “humanitarian zones” was established. These are clearly marked zones whose inhabitants request that the parties to the conflict respect their decision not to participate in the conflict. They represent a means of protection, and also send the message to the parties to the conflict that their rights as civilians should be respected. The humanitarian zones of the Urada Jiguamiandó reservation, Pueblo Nuevo and Nueva Esperanza are located in the Jiguamiandó river basin and the residents have demanded the right of the civilian population not to be involved in the conflict.

Since 2015 there have been reports of paramilitary groups in the zone, stirring up fear among the inhabitants and threatening the leaders of the communities. The Ombudsperson has warned of the community’s vulnerability and risk of further collective displacements on numerous occasions. Despite these warnings, the state response has still not been comprehensive nor timely and the inhabitants feel threatened by the paramilitary groups.

Name: Argemiro Bailarín (m), Manuel Denis Blandón (m), Melkin Romaña (m), Erasmo Sierra (m) and Benjamín Sierra (m), and the Indigenous and Afro-Colombian residents of humanitarian zones in Pueblo Nuevo and Nueva Esperanza, in the Jiguamiandó river basin.

Gender m/f: All

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