

# URGENT ACTION

## AFRO-DESCENDANT COMMUNITY AT RISK

**A member of an Afro-descendant community in Colombia has been subjected to enforced disappearance, and possibly killed, by paramilitaries. The rest of the community are in grave danger.**

Jhon Jairo Palacios, a member of an Afro-descendant community in the Cacarica River Basin in the north-west of the country, was abducted after he left his home in the Barranquilla area of the Cacarica River Basin, to take a boat to the municipal capital, Ríosucio, department of Chocó. On 30 July he telephoned his family to inform them that he would be returning to the Cacarica River Basin the following morning. His family called his mobile phone the next day. A man answered who said he was a member of a paramilitary group operating in the region, and went on, "Tell his family that he is already dead" (*dígale a su familia que él ya está muerto*). The family asked where his body was, and the man told them only that he had been abducted in Ríosucio and taken far away. On 9 August, sources close to the paramilitaries claimed that paramilitaries had killed Jhon Jairo Palacios.

The enforced disappearance and possible killing of Jhon Jairo Palacios came days before a contract was awarded for the construction of a major road in the region. The Cacarica communities have opposed this project, and there is concern that the enforced disappearance may be an attempt to silence them.

Paramilitaries have maintained a strong presence in the region despite the large presence of the armed forces. Paramilitary presence in the region has continued although army-backed paramilitaries were supposedly demobilized under a government-backed process during the previous government of President Álvaro Uribe. Over recent years Amnesty International has received reports of a regular paramilitary presence in La Honda and Tumaradó where paramilitaries stop and search people travelling into the Cacarica River Basin. In recent days paramilitaries were reported once again to be in the Tumaradó and La Honda areas.

### **PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:**

- Calling on the authorities to do everything necessary to establish the whereabouts of Jhon Jairo Palacios and if still alive to guarantee his safety and to order a full and impartial investigation into his enforced disappearance, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Calling on them to take action to guarantee the safety of the Afro-descendant population of Cacarica as deemed appropriate by that population;
- Urging them to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 4 OCTOBER 2010 TO:**

#### President

Señor Presidente Juan Manuel Santos  
Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño,  
Carrera 8 No.7-26, Bogotá, Colombia  
Fax: +57 1 337 5890

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

#### Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sra. Angela María Holguín  
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores  
Calle 10 No 5-51, Palacio de San  
Carlos, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +571 562 7822/ 571 562 7836

Salutation: Dear Minister/  
Estimada Sra. Ministra

#### **Copies to:**

Human rights organization  
Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz  
Calle 61A, No. 17-26 (Chapinero),  
Bogotá, Colombia

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Over 3,000 members of the Afro-descendant communities of the Cacarica River Basin were forcibly displaced in the course of a large-scale joint army and paramilitary operation in February 1997. In the face of repeated paramilitary death threats and killings many of these people returned to their lands in 2000 and 2001. The Cacarica communities' insistence on their right as civilians not to be drawn into the conflict and that combatants, whether members of the armed forces, their paramilitary allies or guerrilla forces, remain outside their "humanitarian zones" have resulted in repeated threats and human rights abuses. The vast majority of these abuses have been committed by paramilitaries. Guerrilla forces operating in the department of Chocó have also killed or threatened civilians they accuse of collaborating with their enemies.

The Cacarica River Basin is in a region earmarked for a major road-building project. Jhon Jairo Palacios was subjected to enforced disappearance -shortly before the contract for the construction of a road was awarded to a consortium. There is a danger that more people will be killed to silence any local opposition to the project.

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