

URGENT ACTION

AFRO-DESCENDANT COMMUNITIES THREATENED

At least two people from Afro-descendant communities in western Colombia have been killed and others threatened by paramilitaries operating in the area. Human rights defenders accompanying the communities have themselves been threatened and labelled as guerrilla collaborators in an effort to discredit them.

Afro-descendant communities living in the Collective Land Title of Calima, and the nearby Land Title of San Juan, in the departments of Valle del Cauca and Chocó respectively, have been threatened by paramilitaries. Paramilitary groups calling themselves *Los Rastrojos* or *Águilas Negras* (Black Eagles) have stated they aim to take control of the area in October. At least two people from these communities, including Juan Bautista Murillo and Edwin Pedroza, have been killed since July.

On 31 August, the human rights organization Inter-Church Commission of Justice and Peace (*Comisión Inter-ecclesial de Justicia y Paz*), which accompanies these two communities, as well as other Afro-descendant communities in the country, received reports that paramilitaries had threatened to kill local residents who reported the killings. They also warned residents not to provide information to *Justicia y Paz* and to stop attending human rights training workshops run by the organization. Earlier in August, paramilitaries circulated a written death threat which declared a priest working in the area and *Justicia y Paz* "military targets" and ordered them to leave the region.

Concerns for the safety of *Justicia y Paz* have been heightened recently by repeated statements in the media accusing the organization of collaborating with the guerrilla organization Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, FARC) in an apparent attempt on the life of Germán Marmolejo on 31 August. Germán Marmolejo has been involved in efforts to develop African Palm plantations and other economic interests on lands claimed by Afro-descendant communities belonging to the Collective Land Titles of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó, in the department of Chocó, which *Justicia y Paz* also accompany. In the past those labelled as guerrilla collaborators have been threatened and killed by the security forces and by paramilitary groups.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to guarantee the safety of members of the Collective Land Titles of Calima and San Juan and of *Justicia y Paz* through measures deemed appropriate by those under threat;
- Demanding a full and impartial investigation into the threats and killings with those responsible brought to justice;
- Ordering a full and impartial investigation into the reported attempt on the life of Germán Marmolejo and ensure this investigation is carried out by the national office of the Attorney General in Bogotá;
- 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 26 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 of Colombia accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Over recent years, Afro-descendant communities living in departments bordering the Pacific coast of Colombia have faced repeated death threats, killings and forced displacement at the hands of paramilitaries, either acting alone or with the collusion of the security forces, who accuse them of being guerrilla collaborators. These human rights violations are often motivated by efforts to secure control over lands rich in mineral resources or with other economic potential. Many of these lands are legally owned by Afro-descendant communities who hold collective land titles. Repeatedly, paramilitaries have threatened and killed members of these communities just in advance of or after they have been granted these land rights. Guerrilla forces have also killed and threatened members of these communities accusing them of siding with the security forces or with paramilitary groups.

Justicia y Paz helps these Afro-descendant communities to pursue justice for human rights abuses. In efforts to protect the collective land titles granted to these communities, it has exposed the link between human rights abuses and the pursuit of economic interests. In the course of this work *Justicia y Paz* workers have faced repeated death threats and campaigns to link them to guerrilla forces. On 8 September, *Justicia y Paz* worker, Danilo Rueda, was approached by two men on a motorbike while waiting for a taxi on a street in the capital Bogotá. The driver grazed Danilo Rueda with the side mirror of the motorbike and the passenger said: "This is a warning, for getting mixed up in things you shouldn't. In recent years, *Justicia y Paz* has received repeated death threats by paramilitaries as a result of its work accompanying Afro-descendant communities. Members of these communities have in turn received similar death threats and several members of the communities have been killed by paramilitaries. For more information, please see the following link <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/016/2010/en>

In relation to the Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó communities, these have reported the theft of their lands by paramilitaries operating in coordination with African Palm companies and other economic interests. Members of these communities and *Justicia y Paz* have also repeatedly been labelled guerrilla supporters by paramilitaries and the security forces. They have also been the victim of repeated efforts, so far unsuccessful, to bring unfounded criminal charges against them. However, Amnesty International is concerned that attempts to link *Justicia y Paz* to the FARC and accuse the organization of involvement in the attempt on the life of Germán Marmolejo are part of this on-going strategy to discredit the organization and weaken its capacity to support the communities of Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó at a critical moment in legal efforts to force African Plant companies and other economic interests operating illegally to leave those lands legally and collectively owned by Afro-descendant communities.

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