



THE CURVARADÓ AND JIGUAMIANDÓ HUMANITARIAN ZONES

COMMUNITIES IN RESISTANCE IN COLOMBIA

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**





**AFRO-DESCENDANT COMMUNITIES
ARE STRIVING TO DEFEND
THEIR LANDS
FROM ENCROACHING ILLEGAL
ACTS
THEY ARE BEING ATTACKED
FROM BOTH SIDES
DESPITE ATTACKS ON COMMUNITIES**

Colombia's 40-year internal armed conflict is a story of countless shattered communities and human tragedies. Millions of civilians have been forcibly displaced, and tens of thousands have been killed. Thousands more have been subjected to enforced disappearance by the security forces or by paramilitaries (either acting alone or in collusion with the armed forces) or abducted by guerrilla groups. No part of the country has escaped the consequences of the conflict. However, it is in remote rural areas, such as the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins in Chocó Department, in the north-west of Colombia, that the scale of devastation is perhaps most profound.

Some communities have taken a stand to defend their right not to be drawn into the conflict. Among them are the Afro-descendant communities living in the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins. Some have set up Humanitarian Zones in an effort to protect their members from attack and to send out a message to the warring parties that their rights as civilians must be respected.


Afro-descendant communities, along with Indigenous People and campesino (peasant farmer) communities, are among those most affected by the conflict. These communities are often located in areas of intense military conflict, most of which are rich in biodiversity and natural resources. These communities are therefore more likely to be attacked and forcibly displaced by those who want to get hold of their land. The risk increases if they are in areas earmarked for large-scale economic projects, such as mineral and oil exploitation, agro-industry developments or hydro-electric schemes. Underpinning the violations, and the failure to bring those responsible to justice, are the deeply entrenched discrimination and marginalization experienced by Afro-descendant communities.

The collective land rights of Indigenous People and Afro-descendant communities are enshrined in Colombia's 1991 Constitution. Some Afro-descendant communities have initiated and sustained campaigns to stop large-scale developments which threaten to expel them from

land which they own collectively or have worked for generations. The warring parties have responded to the determination and resilience of these communities with a persistent disregard for human rights.

The security forces and paramilitaries have attacked such communities, repeatedly labelling them as "subversive". Guerrilla groups have also threatened and killed community members, accusing them of siding with their enemies. Whole communities have often been isolated and trapped (*confinamiento*), unable to access food or medicine because of the fighting. People have also been confined to their communities because of landmines planted around them or because of restrictions placed on the transportation of foodstuffs and medicines by the warring parties, who often argue that such goods are destined for their enemies.

The government of President Álvaro Uribe has claimed that the country is moving steadily towards peace. However, for the people of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó, the conflict remains a constant and very real



**PEOPLE LIVING IN THE CURVARADÓ AND JIGUAMIANDÓ RIVER BASINS
DEFEND THEIR RIGHT TO LIFE AND TO PROTECT THEIR LANDS
FROM ILLEGAL PALM PLANTATIONS.
THE COMMUNITIES' STANCE HAS BEEN MET WITH THREATS AND ATTACKS
DURING THE COLOMBIAN ARMED CONFLICT.
NOTWITHSTANDING THE THREATS TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND LEADERS, THEIR COURAGEOUS RESISTANCE CONTINUES.**

threat to their survival as the killings of their leaders and the expropriation of their land continue.

Walberto Hoyos Rivas, a leader of the Curvaradó River Basin community, was killed on 14 October 2008 by two members of the paramilitary group, the Black Eagles (Águilas Negras). He was shot dead shortly after leaving a community meeting in the Caño Manso Humanitarian Zone, in the Curvaradó region.

Walberto Hoyos Rivas was a witness to the enforced disappearance of another community leader, Orlando Valencia, who was killed by paramilitaries in October 2005. In 2006, a member of a paramilitary group was sentenced to 14 years in prison for his part in the killing; other paramilitaries have also since been implicated. Walberto Hoyos Rivas had been the target of death threats and attacks by paramilitaries because he was a witness in the Orlando Valencia case. He was also a target because of his activities as a community leader

defending human rights including the protection of the collective land rights of Afro-descendant communities in the region – rights which were recognized by the Colombian government in 2000.

In the past few years, many of those who fled their lands following their violent expulsion by paramilitaries and the security forces in the late 1990s have returned to the Afro-descendant communities of Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó. The communities have sought to defend their land rights and prevent the expansion of illegal African palm plantations within their territory. Many of their members have been threatened and killed as a result.

Members of the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz) who work with the Afro-descendant community in the Curvaradó/Jiguamiandó area have also been threatened by paramilitary groups, which continue to operate in many parts of the country, often with the support or acquiescence of the security

forces. The Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, which campaigns on behalf of communities whose members have been killed, tortured or displaced, has also been targeted for attack by guerrilla groups.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights of the Organization of American States has repeatedly called on the Colombian authorities to take appropriate measures to guarantee the safety of members of the Afro-descendant communities of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó, including Walberto Hoyos Rivas. However, the Colombian authorities have failed to take effective action to implement the Court's requests.

Front image: Children from the Afro-descendant communities of Curvaradó/Jiguamiandó

Centre: Increasingly, large-scale palm plantations are dominating the landscape in the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins.



Sign at the entrance to one of the humanitarian zones set up by the local community. The sign reads: "No entry for people carrying arms. Access restricted exclusively to civilians."



For more information about Amnesty International's concerns in the context of the armed conflict in Colombia, please see "Leave us in peace" – Targeting civilians in Colombia's internal armed conflict (Index: AMR 23/023/2008) ISBN 978-0-86210-442-9. The report is available from www.amnesty.org and www.amazon.co.uk

TAKE ACTION NOW

Please write to the Colombian authorities.

Urge them to guarantee the safety of members of the Afro-descendant communities in the Curvaradó/Jiguamiandó region and of members of the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission and other organizations accompanying them, in accordance with their wishes.

Call on them to order a full and impartial investigation into the killing of Walberto Hoyos Rivas, and into more than 100 killings of members of the Afro-descendant communities of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó, and to publish the results and bring those responsible to justice.

Call on them to investigate the threats against members of the Afro-descendant communities in the Curvaradó/Jiguamiandó River Basins and the Inter-Church Justice and Peace

Commission, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice.

Request that they take appropriate steps to ensure that the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission and other NGOs working in the area can carry out their legitimate and important work for the defence of human rights.

Call on them to take action to confront and dismantle paramilitary groups and investigate and break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations.

Please send 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 Defence
Dr. Juan Manuel Santos
Avenida El Dorado, Carrera 52 OFI. 217,
Centro Administrativo Nacional (CAN),
Bogotá, Colombia
Fax: +57 1 266 1003
(Ask "me da tono de fax, por favor")
Salutation: Dear Dr. Santos/Estimado Dr. Santos

Attorney General
Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán Arana
Fiscal General de la Nación,
Fiscalía General de la Nación Diagonal 22B
(Av. Luis Carlos Galán No. 52-01) Bloque C,
Piso 4,
Bogotá, Colombia
Fax: +57 1 570 2000 (a message in Spanish will ask you to enter extension 2017)
Salutation: Dear Mr Iguarán/Estimado Sr. Fiscal

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL



Amnesty International is a global movement of 2.2 million people in more than 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

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Amnesty International
International Secretariat
Peter Benenson House
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW
United Kingdom
www.amnesty.org