

PUBLIC

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UA 272/05 Fear for Safety/Possible "disappearance"

COLOMBIA **Orlando Valencia (m)  
Other members of the Afro-descendant communities of the Jiguiamiandó and  
Curvaradó River Basins**

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Orlando Valencia, who is standing for election to be a legal representative for one of the Afro-descendant communities in the department of Chocó, in the north-west of the country, was reportedly abducted by army-backed paramilitaries on 15 October, and has not been seen since. The army are reported to have threatened Afro-descendant communities in the region, and they too are believed to be in grave danger.

On 15 October Orlando Valencia was heading for the community of Despensa Media, where the elections were to be held for the Curvaradó River Basin community legal representative, an important post whose responsibilities include upholding the Afro-descendant communities' rights to their land. He was travelling with nine members of the Curvaradó River Basin community, as well as a member of the non-governmental human rights organization *Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz*, Inter-church Justice and Peace Commission, and a member of an international non-governmental organization working with the Curvaradó communities.

On their way from the town of Belén de Bajirá, department of Chocó, to the riverside town of Brisas, where they were planning to catch a boat to Despensa Media, their vehicle was reportedly stopped by police. Orlando Valencia and the two NGO members were ordered into a police vehicle, and the other nine people were ordered to follow it to the police station in Belén de Bajirá. Witnesses apparently saw three paramilitary gunmen in the area where the police stopped them.

At the police station, police officers reportedly accused Orlando of having been a member of the guerrilla group *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), Revolutionary Army Forces of Colombia. By 12.30pm Orlando and the others had all been released, and they went to the house of an acquaintance in Belén de Bajirá. Orlando Valencia was reportedly stopped outside the house by two paramilitaries travelling on a motorcycle. The member of *Justicia y Paz* reportedly tried to intervene to protect Orlando, and the paramilitaries threatened him. They then ordered Orlando to get onto the motorcycle: "*vamos o si no lo pelamos aquí*", "let's go or we'll finish you off here," and left on the road leading to the municipality of Chigorodó, in the neighbouring department of Antioquia. Orlando Valencia has not been seen since. Paramilitaries reportedly kept the others in his group under surveillance after he was abducted.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In recent years many Afro-descendant communities have sought to secure title over land on which their communities have lived for many years. Among these communities are those of the Curvaradó and Jiguiamiandó River Basins. Despite securing land titles the communities of Curvaradó and Jiguiamiandó have faced repeated death threats from paramilitaries and the security forces. Paramilitaries have attempted to force the Afro-descendants to grow plantations of African Palm, a cash crop used in products ranging from cooking oil to soap, and have reportedly occupied some of their land. Orlando Valencia had publicly denounced the presence of African Palm plantations, and the presence of paramilitaries together with members of the security forces in the Curvaradó River Basin. Guerrilla forces have also repeatedly threatened Afro-descendant communities in Chocó and killed members of the communities they accuse of siding with their enemies.

Soldiers from the army's XVII Brigade have reportedly warned communities in the Jiguamiandó river basin that they should expect a paramilitary raid. On 10 October, soldiers reportedly ransacked several homes in the community of Nueva Esperanza, and threatened the inhabitants: "*en tres días vienen los que van a cortar cabezas*", "in three days the ones that chop heads off are coming". The army has made similar threats elsewhere in the country to warn of possible paramilitary incursions. In late September army units had reportedly destroyed homes in another Jiguamiandó River Basin community, Bella Flor Remacho. On 15 March 2005, after being told of repeated death threats by paramilitaries operating with the support of the XVII Brigade, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of American States (OAS) issued a resolution calling on the Colombian authorities to guarantee the safety of the communities of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Orlando Valencia, who was reportedly abducted by paramilitaries backed by the security forces on 15 October;
- urging the authorities to conduct a full and impartial investigation to establish his whereabouts and guarantee his safety and safe release;
- expressing concern for the safety of other inhabitants of the communities of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins, who have recently been threatened with a paramilitary raid, and urging the authorities to take all measures deemed appropriate by the communities themselves to protect them, in line with repeated IACHR resolutions;
- urging that all those responsible for killings or disappearances in the area be brought to justice;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in Chocó, urging that the results are made public and those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups are brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with United Nations recommendations.

**APPEALS TO:**

President of the Republic

Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-2, Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 337 5890**

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

Attorney General

Dr. Mario Germán Iguarán, Fiscal General de la Nación, Fiscalía General de la Nación, Diagonal 22B 52-01 (Ciudad Salite), Bogotá, Colombia

**Fax: + 57 1 570 2000 (a message in Spanish will ask you to enter extension 2017)**

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Dra. María Carolina Barco Isakson, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Calle 10 No 5-51, Palacio de San Carlos, Bogotá, COLOMBIA

**Fax: +57 1 562 7822**

**Salutation: Sra Ministra/Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

Non-governmental human rights organization

Comisión Intereclesial Justicia y Paz, Calle 50, No13-19, Oficina 203  
Bogotá, Colombia

and to diplomatic representatives of Colombia accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 November 2005.