

URGENT ACTION

FURTHER THREATS IN 'HUMANITARIAN ZONE'

Paramilitaries continue to threaten and shoot at human rights defenders and members of the Humanitarian Zone of Puente Nayero in the port city of Buenaventura, Southern Colombia.

On 27 May community leader **Doris Valenzuela** was informed of threats made by paramilitaries to "dismember" (*picada*) her and her 16-year-old son **Christian David Aragón**. On the same day she also received four threatening phone calls. Doris Valenzuela has been working to prevent forced recruitment of children, including of her son, by paramilitaries. Doris Valenzuela and her son are part of the 297 families who make up the **Humanitarian Zone of Puente Nayero** in Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca Department, a civilian initiative designed to protect communities at risk of human rights violations and abuses.

Many of the Afro-descendants who are living in the Humanitarian Zone of Puente Nayero have been repeatedly threatened in recent weeks, in spite of the presence of the security forces in the area. A seven-year-old child was threatened with death for allegedly informing police of the whereabouts of weapons stashed by paramilitaries close to the Humanitarian Zone, and on 18 May **José Miller Sinisterra**, who had been speaking with community leaders, was shot at by paramilitaries just outside the Humanitarian Zone.

Paramilitaries have also been repeatedly entering the Humanitarian Zone and threatening residents because of their attempt to create a safe place, saying for instance: "For this you must be killed" (*Por eso a ustedes hay que matarles*). Some residents have been forcibly displaced from the Humanitarian Zone as a result of the threats.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety of Doris Valenzuela, Christian David Aragón, José Miller Sinisterra and the 297 families of the Humanitarian Zone of Puente Nayero in Buenaventura, as well as those accompanying them, and urging the authorities to provide effective protection for them in accordance with their wishes;
- Calling on the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation into paramilitary threats against the human right defenders and inhabitants of Buenaventura, to publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Urging the government to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 JULY 2014 TO:

President

Presidente Juan Manuel Santos
 Presidente de la República, Palacio de
 Nariño, Carrera 8, No. 7-26
 Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 596 0631

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

Defence Minister

Señor Juan Carlos Pinzón
 Ministerio de Defensa
 Carrera 54, No. 26-29
 Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 266 1003

**Salutation: Dear Minister Pinzón/
 Sr. Ministro Pinzón**

And copies to:

NGO

Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz
 Calle 61A, No. 17-26
 Bogotá, Colombia

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. This is the first update of UA 104/14. Further information:
www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR23/016/2014/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Buenaventura is an important port on the Colombian Pacific Coast in the department of Valle del Cauca. There are a number of large-scale infrastructure projects being developed in the city, which still has a strong presence of paramilitary groups which have been able to operate despite the presence of large contingents of security forces personnel.

There have been reports of numerous killings, forced displacements and forced disappearances in the city. A report issued by the Human Rights Ombudsman (Defensor del Pueblo) in November 2012 estimated that more than 1,000 families had been forcibly displaced in the two weeks leading up to the report's publication. Since then, the human rights situation has remained critical and in the first week of November 2013 over 2,000 people were also forcibly displaced from their homes.

Victims are taken to houses known as "casas de pique" where witnesses hear the screams of those being tortured to death. The bodies are often dumped in clandestine cemeteries or in the sea, which means that the whereabouts of many of the victims remain unknown.

Despite the strong presence of the security forces, which includes not only the police but also Marine Infantry units (since 1999 there have been around 1,500 troops in Buenaventura), paramilitaries have been able to operate continuously with little action by the authorities to stop their activities. Witnesses have stated that although the security forces know who the paramilitaries are and where the paramilitary commanders live, they have taken no decisive action to confront them. Similarly, the authorities know where the houses used by paramilitaries to kill their victims are located as well as knowing where the clandestine cemeteries used by the paramilitaries are situated.

The Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission has been accompanying Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities living in different parts of the country who are at risk of serious human rights abuses and violations, including forced displacement. They have participated in the initiatives to create Humanitarian Zones in different parts of the country in an attempt to protect civilians at risk.

The Humanitarian Zone of Puente Nayero in the Barrio La Playita was created on 13 April 2014, in a public event with the participation of representatives from the Catholic Church, as well as local, national and international human rights organizations. Following the increase of human rights abuses and violations in the area since November 2013, including killings, forced displacements and forced disappearances, leaders of the community visited other humanitarian zones in Colombia and decided to create one in Buenaventura as a means to guarantee the protection of the civilian population.

Name: Doris Valenzuela (f), Christian David Aragón (m), José Miller Sinisterra (m), 297 families of the Humanitarian Zone of Puente Nayero in Buenaventura, those accompanying them
Gender m/f: both

Further information on UA: 104/14 Index: AMR 23/020/2014 Issue Date: 2 June 2014