

URGENT ACTION

AFRO-DESCENDANT LEADERS THREATENED

Leaders of the Afro-descendant community of La Toma in the municipality of Suárez, Cauca Department in south-western Colombia, have been threatened by paramilitaries as they campaign to stop illegal mining operations on the community's lands.

On 8 February, **Sabino Lucumi**, the President of the Community Council (Consejo Comunitario) of the Afro-descendant community of **La Toma**, received a death threat via SMS text. Also named and threatened were **Eduar Mina**, Coordinator of the Human Rights Committee of La Toma, **Jhon Jairo Valverde**, their financial officer, and **Francía Márquez**, their legal representative. The threat, signed by the Black Eagles (Águilas Negras) paramilitary group, stated: "We have already located all the snitches of the Community Council of La Toma who are opposed to the development of the community [...] and order the incineration of the machinery. We already know the movements of the leaders and your families [...] we have orders to carry out a cleansing in the south of Valle Cauca of those who block the roads [...]".

This threat comes in the wake of several death threats against community leaders in recent months as they have called on the national and regional authorities to take action to put an end to illegal mining operations in La Toma and remove the diggers which are being used by the miners. The threat appears to make reference to action taken by members of the community, in late December 2014, to stop two diggers from being used. These machines were impounded by the Colombian authorities and one of them was subsequently destroyed. The community has no information on what happened to the other digger. Since then there has been an increase of diggers in the area. The message also makes an apparent reference to a march from Cauca to the capital, Bogotá, staged by women from La Toma in late November 2014 to demand the government take action to end the illegal mining operations.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for those threatened and urging the authorities to immediately provide effective protection including comprehensive collective protection for them in accordance with their wishes and needs;
- Calling on the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation into the death threats, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Reminding them to fulfil their obligation to protect human rights defenders, as set out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- Urging the authorities to take action against paramilitary forces and break any links between them and the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 27 MARCH 2015 TO:

President

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**

Minister of Interior

Juan Fernando Cristo Bustos
 Ministerio del Interior
 Calle 12B No 8-46, Primer Piso
 Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 283 9876

Email:
 mesadeentrada@mininterior.gov.co

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

And copies to:

NGO
 NOMADESC
 Carrera 9 No 4-53
 Barrio San Antonia
 Cali, 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.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

During the long-running armed conflict in Colombia, human rights defenders, as well as Indigenous, Afro-descendant and peasant farmer communities, have endured the brunt of the conflict. All the warring parties – the security forces, either alone or in collusion with paramilitary groups, and guerrilla forces – are responsible for human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, including killings, enforced disappearances or abductions, torture, forced displacement and crimes of sexual violence.

In late November 2014, women of the Afro-descendant community of La Toma, in the municipality of Suárez, staged a demonstration that involved a march from Cauca Department to Bogotá. The women were protesting against the presence of mechanical diggers carrying out illegal gold mining in the Afro-descendant territory. The women demanded that the government ensure that decisive action be taken to remove the machinery; to withdraw a number of gold mining titles granted to national and international mining interests in line with a Constitutional Court ruling (of 14 December 2010) that called for the withdrawal of these titles since they had been granted without a process of free prior and informed consultation; and for action to be taken to guarantee the safety of community members and leaders.

Over recent years La Toma community leaders have faced repeated death threats in the context of campaigning for recognition of the territorial rights of the community and against the presence of national and international gold-mining companies in La Toma. On 11 December 2014 the government reached an agreement with the community to take action but to date little has been done to end illegal mining operations in La Toma. On 29 December 2014 members of the community of La Toma stopped mining work that was being carried out by miners with two diggers and contacted the Colombian authorities who impounded the machines and subsequently destroyed one of them. On 4 January 2015 and in previous days community leaders Licifrey Ararat and Francia Márquez were subsequently threatened.

Name: Sabino Lucumi (m), Francia Márquez (f), Eduar Mina (m), Jhon Jairo Valverde (m), Licifrey Ararat (m), leaders of the Afro-descendant community of La Toma

Gender m/f: both

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