

# URGENT ACTION

## TARGETED COMMUNITY LEADERS IN DANGER

**Paramilitaries are looking for Afro-descendant leaders Ligia María Chaverra and Enrique Petro in the Curvaradó River Basin, Northern Colombia. Their lives are in danger.**

On 22 January two men – thought to be paramilitaries – arrived on motorbikes in the Humanitarian Zone of Las Camelias in El Carmen del Darién Municipality, Chocó Department. The men were looking for **Ligia María Chaverra**, an Afro-descendant community leader, and were reported as saying, “We need to speak with her and just her” (*Nosotros tenemos que hablar con ella y con nadie más*). In recent months, paramilitaries have stated their intention to kill Ligia María Chaverra and 40 other local community leaders by declaring them military targets. On 15 January seven men on motorbikes came looking for community leader **Enrique Petro** in the nearby Humanitarian Zone of Andalucia. Enrique Petro informed the members of the armed forces, who said that the men lived nearby, but that they did not know their identities. Locals have also said that they did not know who any of the men were.

Despite the strong army presence in the region, Amnesty International has received repeated reports of paramilitaries present in the area. Concerns for the safety of Enrique Petro have been heightened by the fact that since 15 January, soldiers positioned on the perimeter of the Humanitarian Zone of Andalucia were withdrawn.

In December 2012, Enrique Petro testified in Medellín against the African palm plantation businesses that are illegally occupying territory of the Afro-descendant communities. Paramilitaries and palm plantation workers have threatened Enrique Petro, saying that they knew that he testified against them.

### **Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:**

- Expressing concern for the safety of Ligia María Chaverra, Enrique Petro and other community leaders in the Curvaradó and Jiguamiando River Basin, and urging the authorities to provide effective protection for Ligia María Chaverra and Enrique Petro in accordance with their wishes;
- Calling on the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation into paramilitary threats to kill Ligia María Chaverra, Enrique Petro and 40 community leaders in recent months and to make the results public and bring those responsible to justice;
- Urging them to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 7 MARCH 2013 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

Juan Carlos Pinzón  
 Ministerio de Defensa  
 Carrera 54, no.26-29  
 Centro Administrativo Nacional (CAN)  
 Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: + 57 1 266 1003

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

#### **And copies to:**

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

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.**

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
 INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A report by the Colombian Institute for Rural Development (*Instituto Colombiano de Desarrollo Rural, INCODER*), made public in December 2012, identified business people who were illegally exploiting the land that is part of the collective territory of the Afro-descendant communities. In a new judicial ruling (Auto 299 of 18 December 2012), the Constitutional Court established a timeframe and criteria that the government should follow, to ensure the return of lands to the Afro-descendant communities misappropriated by agro-industrial concerns. In the past, death threats and serious human rights violations have coincided with attempts by State authorities to implement court and other orders to ensure the return of misappropriated lands.

In November 2012 paramilitaries set up camp in the community of El Guamo, also in El Carmen del Darién Municipality. They identified themselves as the Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces (*Autodefensas Gaitanistas*). They threatened the community council, saying that the members of the community council would suffer the consequences if they made the presence of the paramilitaries known, and let them know that they would “clean” the area of thieves. They also asked the civilians about the presence of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC*).

In 2008 a businessman linked to the African palm interest in the area, and considered to have links with local paramilitaries, offered a reward to kill Manuel Denis Blandón, the former legal representative of the community council, and Ligia María Chaverra.

In April 2006 Enrique Petro gave four hectares of his own land to the returned displaced people from the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó region to create one of several “Humanitarian Zones” – enclosed areas in which inhabitants demand that the parties to the conflict respect their decision not to take sides in the hostilities. This is a means of protection; it also sends a message to the warring parties that their rights as civilians must be respected.

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 and other economic activities within their territory. Many of their members have been threatened and killed as a result. In the last couple of years a number of members of the Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó region who have complained about the occupation of their lands by African palm growers and other economic interests have been killed by paramilitaries, who continue to maintain a strong presence in the region despite the large army presence in the area.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights of the Organization of American States has issued provisional protection measures on behalf of Enrique Petro and María Ligia Chaverra and 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. However, the Colombian authorities have failed to take effective action to implement the Court's requests.

Afro-descendant communities, along with indigenous people and peasant farmer communities, are among those most affected by the Colombia's long-running internal armed conflict. They have been subjected to enforced disappearance by the security forces or paramilitaries – either acting alone or in collusion with the armed forces – and abducted by guerrilla groups.

Name: Ligia María Chaverra (f) and Enrique Petro (m)  
Gender m/f: both

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