

PUBLIC

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Fear for Safety

COLOMBIA

**Enrique Petro (m)
Members of the Afro-descendant communities of the Cacarica, Jiguamiandó and
Curvaradó River Basins in the department of Chocó**

Members of Afro-descendant communities in the Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó River Basins in Chocó department have reportedly received death threats from army-backed paramilitaries operating in the area. This coincides with reports that paramilitaries are stepping up their activity throughout the north of Chocó including nearby Cacarica River Basin, where communities are also at risk.

On 16 August 2006 army-backed paramilitaries reportedly approached inhabitants of the Curvaradó River Basin in the nearby town of Belén de Bajirá, and informed them that paramilitaries were planning to kill Enrique Petro, a member of an Afro-descendant community in the Curvaradó River Basin. In March 2006 members of the armed forces had reportedly accused Enrique Petro of being linked with guerrillas. The paramilitaries also stated that they were preparing to kill other members of the Curvaradó communities living in the *Zona Humanitaria del Curvaradó*, Curvaradó Humanitarian Zone, as well as members of international human rights monitoring groups accompanying these communities. The paramilitaries had allegedly told the inhabitants: “*Solamente están esperando la orden y el momento que diga el superior para actuar*”, (“We are only waiting for the commander to give the order and say when to act”).

Enrique Petro has been among a group of inhabitants of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó communities which has denounced the development of illegal plantations of African palm, a cash crop used in products ranging from cooking oil to soap, on lands belonging to these communities. In the past those community activists and others who have been accused of links with guerrillas by the security forces have frequently been the target of serious human rights violations by paramilitary forces. On 11 August 2005 paramilitaries had threatened Enrique Petro stating that unless he stopped denouncing illegal African palm plantations he would be killed.

This recent threat comes shortly after the supposed “demobilization” of the *Bloque Elmer Cárdenas* (BEC), Elmer Cárdenas Bloc, an army-backed paramilitary group which operates in the north of Chocó Department, in which the communities of the Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó River Basins are situated. The threat also coincides with a report on the demobilization of the BEC on the *La Noche* current affairs programme on Colombian national television. The report claimed that documents in the possession of the government state that the “demobilized” paramilitaries from the BEC plan to continue to operate and to threaten the civilian population in the region, leading to continued killings, threats and “disappearances” of members of the civilian population. The documents also allegedly refer to the fact that the paramilitaries plan to continue to consolidate their economic power in the region through the development of African palm plantations and other agricultural projects, and that they are consolidating their military presence in several areas including the Cacarica River Basin. The Afro-descendant communities of the Cacarica River Basin have also campaigned for their right not to be drawn into the conflict to be respected and in recent years have faced repeated death threats and killings committed by army-backed paramilitaries. It is feared that they may also be at risk.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent years many Afro-descendant communities have sought to secure ownership of land on which their communities have lived for many years. Among these communities are those of the Cacarica, Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins. Despite securing titles for their lands, the communities of Cacarica, Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó have faced repeated death threats from paramilitaries and the security forces.

Paramilitaries have forced the Afro-descendant communities to grow plantations of agricultural produce including African palm, and have reportedly occupied some of the communities' land. In recent years, the development of these plantations has coincided with repeated death threats made by the security forces and their paramilitary allies. These communities have attempted to assert their right as civilians not to be drawn into the conflict between left-wing guerrillas and government security forces backed by paramilitaries, by insisting that armed groups remain outside the areas where they live which they have declared "Humanitarian Zones".

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

- expressing concern for the safety of inhabitants of the Afro-descendant communities in the north of Chocó, including the Cacarica, Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó River Basins, and particularly for the safety of Enrique Petro;
- expressing concern for the inhabitants of the *Zona Humanitaria del Curvaradó*, Curvaradó Humanitarian Zone, and for human rights organizations based within the zone, following reported paramilitary death threats;
- expressing concern that illegal occupation of land owned by these communities for agricultural purposes, particularly the growth of African palm, has coincided with repeated death threats by army-backed paramilitaries;
- noting that concerns for the safety of these communities are heightened by reports that "demobilizing" paramilitary structures in the area intend to continue their operations and advance economic agricultural projects in the area;
- calling for all measures, deemed appropriate by these communities, to be taken to guarantee their safety;
- calling for full and impartial investigations into the death threats, for the results to be made public and those responsible 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

Vicepresident of the Republic

Vicepresidente Dr. Francisco Santos Calderón

Carrera 8A No 7-57, Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: +57 1 444 21 58

Salutation: Exco. Sr Vicepresidente Santos / Dear Vicepresident Santos

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)

Salutation: Sr. Fiscal General / Dear Attorney General

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 3 October 2006.