

September 9, 2008

Mr. Carlos Franco
Programa Presidencial de Derechos Humanos

Dear Mr. Franco,

We are deeply concerned about a number of recent threats and attacks against human rights defenders of the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP) in the Curvaradó river basin in Urabá, Chocó. CIJP is in Curvaradó accompanying Afro-Colombian and mestizo communities who seek the return of land unlawfully appropriated by African palm companies and cattle farmers.

CIJP has received eight telephone threats in the last two weeks, threatening its members and their families with death and instructing them to leave the humanitarian zones in Curvaradó. Some of the calls were made by people identifying themselves as members of the “Black Eagles” paramilitary group and originated from identified phone numbers which have been reported to the authorities. In the night of 30 August, two unidentified men entered the humanitarian zone of Camelias and fled when apprehended by members of the community.

The most concerning event was the kidnapping of Yimmi Armando Jansasoy Muñoz, of CIJP’s team in Curvaradó, by presumed paramilitaries on September 3rd. They forced him at gunpoint into a truck where he was held for over an hour, threatened and told to provide the names of people who live in the humanitarian zones. Mr. Jansasoy was told that he had until Sunday, September 7th at 10.00am to provide the information or he and his family would bear the consequences. Mr. Jansasoy and four other members of CIJP have now been forced to leave Curvaradó for their own safety.

These events indicate that the safety of human rights defenders and Afro-Colombian and mestizo community members in Curvaradó is deteriorating. We believe that the recent threats and attacks against CIJP are intended to pressure CIJP into leaving the area. The presence of CIJP and international human rights organizations is vital in order to provide a degree of security for the Afro-Colombian and mestizo communities; prevent their further displacement; and inform the international community of the security threats to human rights defenders.

We note that CIJP has kept the Colombian authorities and international community formally informed of events. We respectfully request that your government make clear its expectation of prompt, impartial and comprehensive investigations into the threats against CIJP and the kidnapping of Mr. Jansasoy. We also ask that you inform us which Attorney General’s office will be handling the investigation, and what progress is being made. Failure to effectively investigate these and other threats, intimidation, disappearance and murder suffered by human rights defenders and citizens exercising their legitimate rights to free speech and association contribute to an environment in which such abuses are repeated and often tolerated.

We understand that Colombian authorities have agreed to provide measures of protection for CIJP’s members. We urge you to ensure that protective measures are implemented as a matter of urgency. Furthermore we ask that the Community Councils of Jiguamiando and the

families of Curvaradó also be granted protective measures given the provisional measures awarded to them by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Due to the heightened risks faced by human rights defenders and communities in Curvaradó, we urge you to ensure the permanent presence of the Human Rights Ombudsman in the area over the coming weeks.

We note with concern the lack of progress in the Attorney General's criminal investigation into 23 members of the palm oil companies for illegal appropriation of land, forced displacement and conspiracy to commit a crime (case number 3856). We understand that a Judicial Inspector (Procurador Judicial) was to be appointed to look into the delay, and would be grateful if you would inform us as to the progress in the case.

We are concerned by the permanence of the military and financial structures of un-demobilized paramilitaries in the area of Urabá who continue to exercise social, territorial and economic control in the area. These structures, and the lack of investigation into their activities, are an ongoing and serious risk to the safety of human rights defenders.

Finally, we ask that the Colombia government issue a public statement supporting the legitimacy of human rights work generally, and that of CIJP and the Afro-Colombian and mestizo communities of Curvaradó specifically.

We remain acutely aware of the heightened risks facing human rights defenders and communities in Curvaradó in the near future and hope that you can take the above measures which would improve their situation considerably.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Hudson

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