



7 de julio, 2008

Dr. Mario Hernán Iguarán Arana
Fiscal General de la Nación
Diagonal 22-B #52-01
Bogota, Colombia.

CC

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Edgardo Maya Villazon
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Estimado Fiscal General Iguarán:

Intimidation against Justice and Peace Commission in Curvaradó

Dear Attorney General Iguaran:

We, the 1,257 signers of this letter, join Human Rights First in expressing our grave concern about the reported intimidation and assault of Alirio Peña, and other human rights defenders, by known members of the Black Eagles paramilitary group and local farmers in Curvaradó, Chocó on Friday, June 20.

Alirio Peña is an important human rights defender and leader of the *Comisión Interreclial de Justicia y Paz* (Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission). The Justice and Peace Commission works to challenge the acquisition of traditionally collective Afro-Colombian land by paramilitary groups. After paramilitaries displaced the Afro-Colombians in 1996, their land fell into the possession of livestock farmers and companies that have used the land for African Palm plantations. Today the Commission advocates for the return of this land to its collective owners.

On the morning of June 20, Peña and two other activists from the Justice and Peace Commission were traveling to Caño Manso, near Curavadó, with five members of the displaced Afro Colombian Curvaradó community. They were to

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participate in the official demarcation of land in Curavadó in accordance with the resolutions provided by the Colombian Institute for Rural Development (INCODER). The demarcation of land in the area is an important first step towards returning the land to the Afro-Colombian population.

At 9:50 am a group of armed men reportedly surrounded Peña and the others and blocked the entrance to Caño Manso with trucks. The confrontation lasted until approximately 4pm. During this time the aggressors allegedly assaulted Alirio Peña, filmed the other human rights defenders, and accused the local community members of invading their land. According to eye-witnesses, the group of aggressors included two members of the Black Eagles paramilitary group, José Palacios, alias “Él Diablo” and another man known as “El Dólar”. In addition, one of the trucks used to block the road reportedly belonged to an African Palm farmer.

One day before the confrontation, local officials had reportedly agreed to provide police support for the land demarcation. However, police did not arrive until 1:20p.m. after being informed of the incident as early as 10:30a.m.

We fear that the tactics used by the local farmers and paramilitary members are an attempt to intimidate and threaten the work being done by the Justice and Peace Commission to help local community members regain land that was reportedly illegally appropriated from them in 1996, 1997, and 2001.

We call on you to immediately investigate the events that took place on June 20, and more specifically the Black Eagles paramilitary group’s involvement in the confrontation. In addition we urge that you assure police presence at any future demarcation of land. Finally, we ask you to immediately expedite process 3856, the criminal investigation into 23 members of the palm oil companies for illegal appropriation of land, forced displacement and conspiracy to commit a crime. These proceedings have been stalled for a year and a half and should be resolved promptly.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

The details of the 1,257 signers have been removed in this public version of the letter for privacy reasons.