

Afro-Colombian Solidarity Network (ACSN)*

June 18, 2012

ACSN Concerned about the criminal allegations against Afro-Colombian human rights defender Felix Banguero

The Afro-Colombian Solidarity Network is very concerned about the detention of Felix Manuel Banguero, a long-time community leader and human rights defender; member of the Community Council El Píamo; in the municipality of Guachené, Northern Cauca region; and a founder member of the Black Communities' Process (PCN). Given the troubling climate of judicial persecution and stigmatization against human rights activists in Colombia, ACSN urges the Colombian authorities to ensure full protection of Mr. Banguero's human rights.

Felix Manuel Banguero was arrested on June 8, 2012, accused of rebellion and supposedly having ties to the Sixth Front of the FARC. The arrest of Mr. Banguero was part of a two-day operation led by Colombian authorities in which 27 people from the municipalities of Corinto, Caloto, Guachené, Caldono and Toribío were arrested and accused of rebellion. Most of the arrested people are indigenous and Afro-descendant leaders and politicians, including the indigenous leaders Rafael Ulcué Perdomo and his brother Sergio Ulcué who have been under paramilitary death threats and have security measures from the Inter American Commission of Human Rights.

The ACSN has received several statements in solidarity with the leader Felix Banguero that speak to his long history and trajectory of work in defense of the Afro-descendant communities' rights and as a human rights defender. Mr. Banguero was serving as the Cultural Advisor for the Municipality of Guachené at the time of his arrest.

It has been a systematic practice of the Colombian government to not recognize the work of human rights defenders. On the contrary, its efforts focus on unfounded criminal proceedings against defenders, a tendency that invariably ends in the stigmatization of human rights defenders and the exacerbation of already fragile security conditions.

The Afro-Colombian Solidarity Network is concerned that the case of the leader and human rights defender Felix Banguero, as well as the situation of other leaders detained the weekend of June 8th, is another case of criminalization of human rights defenders for exercising their right to organize and actively defend the rights of their people and their communities.

We ask the Colombian authorities to effectively guarantee the physical integrity

of community leader Felix Banguero, and to fully respect his human rights.

The Afro-Colombian Solidarity Network urges the Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders of the Inter American Commission of Human Rights to monitor closely Mr. Banguero's case, to ensure that his integrity and human rights are respected, and to ensure that there are not political motivations behind Mr. Banguero's detention, to stigmatize his and PCN's work.

The ACSN expresses its solidarity with the Black Communities Process in Colombia (PCN), a partner organization for many years, with the family of Felix Banguero and with the Community Council of El Píamo. We expect to see Felix free and continuing his human rights work immediately.

For more information on this case please contact Charo Mina Rojas, PCN International, at 434-760-0663 or charominarojas@gmail.com

*The Afro-Colombian Solidarity Network (ACSN) includes the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), TransAfrica Forum (TAF), Global Rights, Chicago Religious Leadership Network (CRLN), U.S. Office on Colombia (USOC), International Working Group of the Black Communities' Process (PCN), and activists and scholars Joseph Jordan, Roland Roebuck, Naila Rosario, Ajamu Dillahunt, Eunice Escobar and Arturo Escobar. Peace Brigades International (PBI) serves as an international observer.

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