



Dear All,

Today we write you to ask that you intervene in the following human rights situations:

Afro-Descendant Youth Activist Killed in Buenaventura (Valle del Cauca)

On November 9, Jhon Jairo Ramirez Olaya was found dead in a street known as “Roland’s Cave.” Mr. Olaya was an afro descendant activist who participated in various youth activities and processes in Buenaventura. According to sources, he was assassinated by a paramilitary known as alias “La Perry”. Forty-five minutes before being murdered, he was violently taken from his house in the presence of his family, and human rights activists Leonard Renteria Vallecilla, Jorge Rivas Valenzuela, and Victor Angulo Advincula. The later are members of the human rights organization Rostros & Huellas de Sentir Humano.

Witnesses report that ten young paramilitaries took Mr. Olaya. Six of them entered his house and after a struggle the men hit Mr. Olaya in front of his two daughters and attacked his partner, Marlen Renteria Vallecilla, when she tried to stop them from taking him. Mr. Vallecilla fled to the local police station and was later followed by three people on motorcycles also known to have paramilitary ties. The Mr. Olaya’s murder and the circumstances speak to the lack of state protection that the community of Buenaventura and their human rights defenders endure. This and other recent incidents indicate that the security situation is not nearly as improved as stated by officials of the national government in the press.

WOLA urges the Attorney General’s Office to advance investigations and to clarify the facts, detain, judge and sanction those responsible for the homicide of Mr. Olaya. The National Victims Unit must immediately relocate Mr. Olaya’s family to a secure location. The National Protection Unit should immediately act to guarantee the safety of activists from Rostros & Huellas Sentir Humano. For over a year, WOLA has advocated for improved security measures for Rostros & Huellas that have not materialized.

Victims Advocate Killed Near Home (Cordoba)

On November 13, Luis Francisco Fernando Gonzales, Afro-Colombian representative of the Victims’ Roundtable of Tierralta in Alto Sinu, was assassinated near his home by two sicarios (hired guns) who arrived at his home in motorcycles.

Environmental Activist Murdered (Meta)

On November 13, sicarios killed environmental and human rights activist Daniel Abril of the Civic Human Rights Committee of Meta and Colombia-Europa Estados Unidos (CCEEU). Mr. Abril was a staunch advocate who reported rights abuses and environmental damage committed by multinational oil companies in Casanare. He exposed how the damage was leading to one of the worst droughts in the area's history.

Stray Bullet Takes another Afro-Colombian Boy's Life in Llano Verde (Valle del Cauca)

On November 6, in the community of Llano Verde in Cali, a stray bullet took the life of thirteen year old Breiner Stiven Gamboa Sitesterra who was playing outside with his friends. In the past year and a half, this urban community has had to mourn the lives of 28 individuals. This area is plagued with violence, and its citizens who are predominantly Afro-Colombian have consistently rejected these acts and demand peace.

Clashes between Paramilitaries and the ELN Confine more than 3,000 in Chocó

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that approximately 3,051 people from 15 Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities from the Salaquí and Truandó rivers in the municipality of Riosucio and Domingodó are confined due to clashes between *Autodefesas Gaitanistas* and the ELN guerillas. Restrictions on mobility are caused by constant combatants between the groups in the last months.

According to the U.N., the paramilitary groups have entered the region through the Uraba region causing seven individual displacements and the displacement of 100 Afro-Colombian families to the municipality of Riosucio. The U.N. additionally reports that the ELN and *Autodefesas Gaitanistas* are responsible for the displacement of 1,032 people.

Paramilitary Activity in the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartadó (Antioquia)

In the last month, several events in the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartadó have illustrated the growing presence of paramilitary groups in the region. On October 27, paramilitaries entered the Peace Community and accused its members of collaborating with the guerillas. They warned them that they will ruthlessly fight against guerilla collaboration. As predicted, a series of security incidents took place. On November 2, families in La Esperanza were forcibly displaced. On November 3, the community recounts that Colonel German Rojas accused them of lying to the international community and warned them that criminal charges will be brought against them.

On November 4, during a visit from the human rights ombudsman's office, several paramilitaries dressed in civilian clothing fled the area once they were alerted to the authorities' presence. Three days later (November 7), in the urban area of San Jose de

Apartadó, Alberto Tuberquia was assassinated not far from the military base. That same day several armed individuals demanded the whereabouts of the several rural farmers. The *Autodefensas Gaitanistas* scattered pamphlets in the San Jose de Apartadó area and it is generating fear in this community.

Activists' Family Displaced by Paramilitaries (Buenaventura)

On November 13, four paramilitaries including alias "Jhony" and "Alipio" embarked on a search for Afro-Colombian activist Pascual M. Garces and his family close to Puente Nayero Humanitarian Space. Earlier that day, paramilitaries searched for Mr. Garces's son Wilson and threatened to take his wife to see "Jhony" if they could not locate him. On November 12, paramilitaries had phone Wilson to threaten and extort him. The paramilitary "Alipio" is linked to the murder of Christian Aragon that took place in July 19, 2015. "Jhony" is the paramilitary boss of El Colon neighborhood and "Alipio" is who controls comuna 4 in Buenaventura. These incidents led to the displacement of Mr. Garces' family (5 adults and 4 minors).

Mr. Garces, a leader in the Puente Nayero Humanitarian Space, is the recipient of cautionary measures from the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. The Colombian authorities must immediately apprehend alias "Jhony" and "Alipio" and bring charges against them. Further, action is required to guarantee the safety and well-being of Mr. Garces and his family.

Authorities Fail to Secure the Return of Displaced Wounaan Communities in Buenaventura

On November 4, the Jesuit Refugee Service and CODHES condemned the inability of the Colombian state to ensure the safe return of 132 indigenous families that belong to the communities Chachajo, Chamapuro, Union Agua Clara and Wounaan to their territories. These communities were displaced in from their territories in November of 2014 to Buenaventura after clashes between FARC and paramilitary groups.

For over 10 months, 583 children, women and the elderly have been forced to live in the Sports Complex in Buenaventura, under inadequate conditions that violate their human rights. These communities have expressed their willingness to return to their territories, but the government has not ensured protective measures and safeguards for their return. WOLA also reported on the condition of this community in an analysis available [here](#).

Assassination Attempt against Indigenous Leader Facing Trumped Up Charges (Cauca)

CCEEU reports that on November 17, the indigenous guard was able to stop an effort by four men with weapons who tried to assassinate Feliciano Valencia, the prominent indigenous leader from Cauca that is currently being held at the Finca Gualanday in Santander de Quilichao. While Mr. Valencia was transferred to detention within indigenous territory, the

spurious charges against him remain active. U.S. authorities should intervene to guarantee his safety, that the perpetrators are sanctioned and that the charges are dropped against him.

MOVICE's Caldas Technical Secretary Followed and Threatened

On November 16, MOVICE's Technical Secretary in Caldas, Maria Cardona Mejia, was followed and threatened as she walked to Caldas University. According to MOVICE, Ms. Cardona Mejia was followed by a man who was speaking on a cellphone. After several minutes, the man stood next to her and said to the person on the line, "When I was in the military we committed a lot of massacres, what are going to do with the blonde girl next to me, boss?" This threat is in the context of several attacks against human rights defenders in Colombia in the past year.

We urge U.S. authorities to take action with their Colombian counterparts to guarantee the safety and security of human rights defenders and the Colombian youth mentioned above. The Colombian authorities should be asked to investigate the death threats and security incidents listed above and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Leaders Threatened in Alto Baudó (Chocó)

On November 17, it was reported that leaders from the Afro-Colombian community councils and indigenous cabildos in the Alto Baudó River region have received multiple death threats after they announced that they will be organizing a MINGA (gathering/protest). The MINGA is to protest the national, departmental and local governments' lack of response to the needs of the communities and to seek accountability for their spending. Death threats against leaders including warnings that "the paras will come after them" began on October 8 and intensified on November 17. Sources indicate that the Mayer Fredy Palacios Ramirez, who is accused of misusing public funds, is tied to the threats.

Suspicious Activity and Surveillance in AFRODES Office (Cundinamarca)

On November 5, a suspicious individual visited the AFRODES office asking for the legal representative or the general secretary. When the treasurer who was present, Luzmila Gutierrez, informed him that they were not there, this individual explained that he was facing discrimination for being Afro-descendent, although the AFRODES reports that he did not appear to be of Afro-descent. He asked very specific questions with regards to AFRODES' relationships that AFRODES with international organizations including USAID, and the type of funding they provide.

Ms. Gutierrez felt very uncomfortable with these inquiries, and she alerted the other people in the office. When other people met with him, they noticed that he was recording the conversation on his cell phone. He was asked to leave, and that is when he started to take

pictures of the office, and the rest of the building. The same individual returned to the building, but was not allowed to enter AFRODES offices. According to AFRODES, the individual claimed that he had an appointment, which was untrue. After these incidents, AFRODES has been receiving strange calls and threats from an unknown numbers.

ESMAD's Response Leads to Injuries and Displacements of Afrodescendant Displaced Persons

On November 12, the anti-riot police, ESMAD, stormed the urban settlement of Las Orquideas in comuna 14 of the Agua Blanca District (Cali). For more than five years, 75 families mostly made up of Afro-Colombians displaced from Cauca, Chocó, Valle del Cauca and Nariño have inhabited this area in a desperate attempt to seek refuge from violence. This group contains pregnant women, elderly persons and at least 40 children (including 4 disabled). Ignoring the community's rights, the ESMAD entered the area violently throwing tear gas and plastic bullets. Social organizations and contractors from the Health Ministry tried to stop the ESMAD from acting violently but they failed. As a result, children were forced to take refuge in a community room and various persons were injured including a pregnant woman and disabled girl (see photos). A youth who refused to leave his home when he saw that his parents were assaulted, was forcibly grabbed and he suffered a seizure as a result.

Despite repeated efforts including legal proceedings, the Mayor's office has refused to dialogue and find a solution for this community. Sources report that while the police and ESMAD attacked the population they yelled "We have to give it to those blacks and those who are with them," and "Blacks pieces of sh**t, we are going to throw your stuff out into the street....nothing you have is worth anything."

U.S. policymakers must strongly condemn these actions perpetrated against Afro-Colombian displaced persons. The public forces and Mayor's officials should be investigated and perpetrators brought to justice. U.S. officials should work with Colombia to combat racism in the public forces and to find a constructive solution to the needs of the displaced in the District of Agua Blanca.

Police Officer Suspended for Speaking Out Against Labor Abuses

The union for legal workers in Colombia and related industries (Judicial Asonal S.I-Cali) has demanded the reinstatement of the police officer Ruben Dario Rozo. Mr. Rozo worked for the Police Department for over 20 year, and recently spoke against the lavish benefits that the officers in higher ranks receive, and the large wage gap between those in the upper ranks and the majority of police officers. After these statements were publicly released, Mr. Rozo was suspended from his position and his home was raided. The union demands that Mr. Rozo is reinstated to his position, and that no future action is taken against him or his family.

Labor Violations by McKesson Corporation

On October 1, Felix Joaquin Valencia sent a letter to U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, Kevin Whitaker and Labor Attaché, Brenna Dougan, informing of labor violation of McKesson Corporation. According to Mr. Valencia, there is substantial evidence of contract and labor violations by the corporation. Under the U.S.-Colombia Labor Action Plan, these types of violations must be closely observed and action taken in order to respect the bilateral agreements.

We also take this opportunity to encourage you to read and view the following:

English

Article *Al-Jazeera*- Blood gold: From conflict zones in Colombia to jewelry stores in the U.S.

<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/11/18/blood-gold-colombia.html>

Article in *NACLA*- Survival, Profit, and War: The Many Faces of Gold Mining in Colombia (Pt. 1)

<https://nacla.org/news/2015/11/09/survival-profit-and-war-many-faces-gold-mining-colombia>

Article *Amsterdam News*--Afro-Colombians dispose of blackface TV character as African-American rep faces racial profiling

<http://amsterdamnews.com/news/2015/nov/06/afro-colombians-dispose-blackface-tv-character-afr/>

Spanish:

Video documental de *Canal Capital* Relatos del Exilio—"Se Exila el Hombre, Pero No La Causa,"

<http://www.canalcapital.gov.co/videos/mediaitem/5243-new-media>

Artículo en *Actualidad Étnica* -"[Qué oscura que está la noche, La noche qué oscura está](http://www.actualidadetnica.com/actualidad/actualidad-col-01/politica/9149-%E2%80%9Cqu%C3%A9-oscura-que-est%C3%A1-la-noche,-la-noche-qu%C3%A9-oscura-est%C3%A1%E2%80%9D.html)"

<http://www.actualidadetnica.com/actualidad/actualidad-col-01/politica/9149-%E2%80%9Cqu%C3%A9-oscura-que-est%C3%A1-la-noche,-la-noche-qu%C3%A9-oscura-est%C3%A1%E2%80%9D.html>

Artículo en *El Afro-Bogotano*- "La memoria de nuestros muertos está siendo burlada en la Habana", Marino Córdoba, presidente de Afrodes

<http://elafrobogotano.com.co/la-memoria-de-nuestros-muertos-esta-siendo-burlada-en-la-habana-marino-cordoba-presidente-de-afrodes/>

Artículo en *El Espectador*- "Por mi color de piel fui tratado de forma distinta en Colombia":
Henry Hank Johnson

<http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/temadeldia/mi-color-de-piel-fui-tratado-de-forma-distinta-colombia-articulo-596275>

For further information please contact Gimena Sanchez of WOLA at gsanchez@wola.org or (202) 797-2171.

November 18, 2015