



## **The Black Communities' Process Asks the U.S. Congress Not to Ratify the Free Trade Agreement with Colombia**

September 2011

Dear Members of Congress,

It is disturbing for us as Afro-descendant communities, organizations, and leaders to report that the Colombian government's lack of political will to respect, protect, and promote our rights is supported by actions of the U.S. government. Our communities constantly face death threats, persecution, displacement and brutal murders of our people and our women and children experience sexual violence. Yet, despite these undeniable realities, our plight is not given any significant weight by many members of the U.S. Congress.

The Department of State just certified that Colombia should be awarded the disbursement of \$23 million dollars for its human rights performance. Similarly, the Congress and President Obama are preparing to ratify the Free Trade Agreement while alluding to advances in the protection of trade unionists in Colombia. We find it a cruel slap in the face for Afro-Colombians, Indigenous, trades unionist and all human rights defenders that, while some media report that U.S. assistance has financed members of the Colombian congress with ties to narco-traffickers, paramilitaries, and illegal activities, the U.S. government agencies and the Congress continued to whitewashed the Colombian government's record.

What will it take for the U.S. Congress and President Obama to understand that the Colombian government does not have the capacity or the political will to effectively address the grave human rights situation and humanitarian crises affecting rural and urban Afro-descendant communities?

Does it matter to the U.S. Congress that U.S. businesses and products imported from Colombia would be stained with the blood of innocent people who were and will be massacred in order to make way for the private interests who will benefit from the FTA? Will it matter to their constituents?

There are currently 5.2 million internally displaced people in Colombia, one third of which are of African descent. Does it worry the U.S. Congress, particularly the members who support the FTA, that the large-scale economic interests that will benefit from the agreement will increase the number of internally displaced people? Would the U.S. Congress think twice if it were to consider that violence has been used to make way for the economic agenda of President Santos, paramilitaries, guerrillas, and the U.S. government?

**“Resistir no es Aguantar”, Mandato de la IV Asamblea PCN, 2008**

What is the United States' real commitment to human rights and democracy if it insists on establishing commercial ties with a country that shows disdain for complying with its own laws and constitutional orders?

For the Black Communities' Process (PCN), the ratification of the FTA is a clear message that the government of the United States is not seriously committed to human rights, democracy, and the eradication of poverty, exclusion, and discrimination.

The FTA will be carried out in conditions of total economic, environmental, and legislative insecurity for Afro-descendant communities who have been systematically excluded from vital decision making processes regarding our economic, cultural, and social development.

The FTA is, in essence, a discriminatory and exclusionary economic policy. It will only exacerbate the structural conditions of discrimination and exclusion that have historically kept Afrodescendant groups marginalized from the benefits that are procured for the rest of Colombian society.

For these reasons, in addition to the commitment of PCN to struggle for the protection of the human, economic, social, cultural, and territorial rights of Afro-Colombian communities, we are unequivocally opposed to the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

PCN applauds the position of members of Congress like Hank Johnson, James McGovern, George Miller, Janice D. Schakowsky, George Miller, Dennis J. Kucinich and Linda Sanchez, among others, for their critical position regarding U.S. assistance to Colombia and the FTA. We urge them to continue to defend their position and the interests of their constituents.

The Black Communities' Process unites with the voice of our indigenous brothers, small-scale farmers, and the workers movement in Colombia, as well as the vulnerable and oppressed sectors in the United States, in calling for an investment and international trade system that respects and promotes dignity; ensures sustainable development; promotes the wellbeing of vulnerable and oppressed populations; respects and promotes racial and gender equality, and respects indigenous peoples' and Afro-descendant rights.

With our traditional affirmation of Life, Happiness, Hope, and Freedom,

Black Communities' Process of Colombia (PCN)  
PCN International Working Group

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**“Resistir no es Aguantar”, Mandato de la IV Asamblea PCN, 2008**