

April 14, 2011

President Juan Manuel Santos  
Casa de Nariño  
Bogotá, Colombia

Dear President Santos,

We, the undersigned members of the Afro-Colombian Solidarity Network\*, are writing to express our deep concern for the safety of members of the Afro-Colombian and mestizo communities of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó.

We have been informed that from Saturday April 9, 2011, members of the National Army's 17th Brigade, who had been providing perimeter protection to members of the Curvaradó communities, apparently withdrew their permanent positions from the areas near the residence of farmer Enrique Petro, and from the immediate vicinity of the humanitarian zones of Llano Rico and Caño Manso, where the Afro-Colombian and mestizo farmers have taken refuge. We understand that the Army explained that the withdrawal was a result of an attack by the FARC-EP guerrilla group in nearby Jiguamiandó. Nonetheless, given the continued existence of paramilitary groups in the area, and the National Police's failure to arrest or evict the illegal occupants and the paramilitaries allegedly collaborating with them, this unilateral withdrawal leaves the inhabitants of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó vulnerable to attack, assassinations and forced displacement.

The Minister of Defense was ordered in 2010 by the Colombian Constitutional Court to guarantee the collective and individual protection of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó communities, and the Colombian State agreed to provide perimeter protection to the communities in consultation with them, in furtherance of their obligations under the provisional measures of protection granted by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. We are therefore concerned that the withdrawal constitutes a breach of the communities' right to be consulted on the protection measures.

We would like to express our satisfaction with the recent visit by Minister of the Interior, Germán Vargas Lleras, and Minister of Agriculture, Juan Camilo Restrepo to Curvaradó. The Colombian Ministers' visit and the drawing up of a timeline for restitution are a positive response to the Orders of the Constitutional Court and Colombian land agency INCODER. It is our sincerest hope that these authorities' visit will push for momentum towards land return in a quick and effective manner.

In recent weeks, failure to reconstitute the lands to the Community Council of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó, evict unlawful occupants or arrest members of paramilitary groups has resulted in a security crisis for the inhabitants: on April 9th, Enrique Petro was followed by paramilitaries on motorcycles; less than a week earlier, Curvaradó resident Santander Nisperuza narrowly avoided an assassination attempt in Belén de Bajirá; the destruction and burning of community crops by unlawful occupants has become a regular occurrence in recent months and no preventative action has been taken by the security forces who were present at the time. We recall, furthermore, that the killings of Ualberto Hoyos in 2008, Benjamin Gomez in 2009 and Argenito Diaz in 2010, all of whom were allegedly assassinated by paramilitaries, have not resulted in a single conviction. We also remind you that members of the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, a human rights organization that protects the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó communities, have received multiple death threats in the last two months, been followed

by alleged paramilitaries in Bogota and in Curvaradó, and have had their Curvaradó field office ransacked by intruders.

We respectfully urge you to urgently:

- ensure that the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior, at the highest level, elaborate in consultation with the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó communities, a protection plan that specifically delineates the responsibilities of the National Police and Army in protecting the lives of the inhabitants , and preventing the destruction of their crops both during and after the census and restitution processes;
- guarantee that the National Police and Army elaborate a schedule for evicting the bad faith occupants; and
- make sure that the National Police and Army undertake decisive action against the paramilitary networks that operate in the region and pose a serious security risk to inhabitants of this region.

We thank you for your continued commitment to protecting the human rights of Afro-Colombian and mestizo communities in Colombia.

Yours sincerely,

Afro-Colombian Solidarity Network (ACSN)

\*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 Process of Black Communities (PCN), and activists and scholars Joseph Jordan, Roland Roebuck, Eunice Escobar and Arturo Escobar. Peace Brigades International (PBI) participates as an observer.

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