



# WASHINGTON OFFICE ON LATIN AMERICA

April 18, 2011

Ambassador Gabriel Silva  
Embassy of Colombia  
2118 Leroy Place, NW  
Washington, DC 20008

***Re: Various Human Rights Cases of Concern***

Dear Ambassador Silva,

I am writing to express my deepest concern regarding several developments in Colombia and to ask that you please intervene to guarantee the safety of the various organizations and individuals working to uphold human rights.

**Partial Withdrawal of 17th Brigade in Curvaradó**

As per the ACSN Open Letter to President Juan Manuel Santos which we faxed to Third Secretary Claudia Cuevas of your Embassy last Thursday, members of the National Army's 17th Brigade, who had been providing perimeter protection to members of the Curvaradó communities, withdrew unilaterally from the areas near the residence of land activist Enrique Petro, and from the humanitarian zones of Camelias, Caracoli, Llano Rico and Caño Manso on April 9. This past Friday, we were alerted from WOLA partners on the ground that approximately 30 paramilitaries entered the area. Over the weekend, we were informed that some of the soldiers returned to the Andalucía area.

Today we were informed that a member of these communities was forced to flee the area after five men came after him with machetes saying they were going to kill him. He managed to get away after perpetrators ripped his shirt.

We kindly ask Ambassador that you please take steps to guarantee that no one from these communities gets hurt and that the protective measures agreed upon by Colombia and the OAS for these communities are fully implemented. We also ask that you use your good offices to advocate for the illegal occupiers of these lands to be evicted as per the tribunal's sentencing on this case that paramilitary groups operating in the Chocó are fully dismantled and that justice is done for the victims of this case.

**Security Situation of Danilo Rueda of Justicia y Paz**

On April 13, members of the NGO Justicia y Paz were followed by car by suspicious individuals while they were being transported in the vehicle provided to them for protection in Bogotá. At a traffic light, this car provided some distance. However, it then proceeded to follow human rights defender Danilo Rueda who also forms part of

MOVICE and Colombianos por la Paz in addition to the NGO Justicia y Paz to his home. The car containing four men then proceeded to stop in front of Mr. Rueda's apartment and one of the men rang his bell. When no one responded they left.

### **Security Situation of Missionaries in Vigía del Fuerte (Chocó)**

On April 17, a man who identified himself as the Roberto alias Galivan who is known to be the Commander of the Urabeño Bloc of the AUC called the telephone line of the pastoral house in Vigía del Fuerte urging members of the church to give him money to buy 30 cellphones. When the church declined and stated that they do not collaborate with any illegal armed groups, the man threatened to "capture, torture and dismember" the priest of the church if his request is not met.

This threat is particularly troubling because it follows a similar one done against other religious leaders in Muríndo. Also the acts the paramilitary threatens to commit have generated panic because in 1997 ACCU who later formed the AUC massacred and dismembered several members of these communities and threw their bodies into the Atrato River.

While the paramilitary presence in the Middle Atrato River is less visible than in the past, residents report that they remain present albeit dressed as civilians in Vigía del Fuerte and areas of Bojayá municipality. They continue to intimidate and control the population. According to the locals, when the armed forces are informed of these paramilitaries' presence, the response has been that they do not have sufficient capacity to detain these persons.

### **Security Situation of CCAJAR Lawyers**

We are concerned about the recent developments concerning the Jose Alvear Lawyers Collective (CCAJAR)'s protective measures. We kindly ask that the Colombian Embassy in DC support CCAJAR's request for a meeting with President Juan Manuel Santos to discuss their physical protection measures, and the broader protection measures that CCAJAR have requested in fulfillment of the IACHR's precautionary measures. In particular, individuals put forward by human rights defenders as bodyguards and drivers that meet the protection program requisites should not be refused on arbitrary grounds, as has apparently been the case with human rights lawyer Jorge Molano, members of Sembrar, and with CCAJAR.

### **Security Situation of Human Rights Lawyers Sofia Lopez and Alexander Montana Narvaez**

On April 11, the organization Corporacion Justicia y Dignidad received a text death threat that roughly translates to: "That that bitch of a lawyer not involve herself in what she shouldn't and she knows what will happen to her and that the lawyer stops messing around..they are military objectives of the organization bca." That same day campesino leader Rafael Ulcue Perdomo who has protective measures from the government received a threatening call from someone known as "The Worm" who was angry because he had reported abuses committed by the Colombian military on February 19th of this year. On April 14, two more threatening phone calls were made to Alexander Montana Narvaez



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and Sofia Lopez. The caller stated to Lopez “we have located you.” Later that day, Sofia Lopez was leaving the offices of the Indigenous Cabildos of Northern Cauca (ACIN) when she noticed two suspicious men in a motorcycle were following her.

### **Security Situation of the Grupo de Trabajo por la Defensa de la Tierra y el Territorio del Departamento de Cordoba**

We are also worried about the safety of members of the communities of Las Pavas and El Garzal, Southern Bolivar who are at risk of becoming displaced from their lands.

According to our Justapaz and CEDECOL partners:

In Córdoba Province, the Ombudsman’s Office (Defensoria del Pueblo) issued the Resolución Defensorial No. 58 on December 28, 2010, where they call on INCODER, the Ministry of Interior and Justice, the Presidential Agency for Social Action, the Provincial Government, the National Police, the Ministry of Environment, Housing and Territorial Development, the Corporación Autónoma Regional de los Valles del Sinú y San Jorge (CVS), the Procuraduría General de la Nación, the Ministry of Social Protection, and the National Commission for Reparations and Reconciliation to respond to the issue of land dispossession in Córdoba.

As of April, 2011 there has been no response from any of these government entities and the communities have faced at least three cases of human rights violations including threats, forced displacement and the murder of leaders. We are also concerned about the community of Las Pavas in southern Bolivar Province. Despite threats and no guarantee of state protection, nearly 100 families from this community decided to return to their land with the accompaniment of national and international organizations. We hope that the government will not consider this a crime and will hear and move forward with the demands of this community.

Finally, we want to express our concerns about the community of El Garzal, also in southern Bolívar Province where 320 families are fighting for their right to land, according to Colombian law. There is an active case in the civil court of the Simití Circuit where a judge is to conduct a visual inspection on April 14, 2011. We are concerned that this inspection will be done in order to define the boundaries of the land in dispute favoring persons connected to paramilitary groups who want the land. We understand that the ownership of these lands should be defined by INCODER and not the judge.

### **Security Situation of Afro-Colombian Leader Geraldine Balanta (Valle del Cauca)**

Geraldine Balanta, community leader from Bajo Calima, received a threatening phone call on March 3rd from military officer Cerda, two days after the members of the military situated themselves in El Crucero community located in the collective territories of Bajo Calima. On March 17th, Claudio Antonio Camayo Chavez who had previously

pacifically confronted the military in order to access the food crops he is growing on his land, had his crops destroyed by soldiers.

This is the community where Colombian soldiers have burned the homes of numerous Afro-Colombians in order to force the eviction of the locals to pave way for the economic development project titled Sweet Water (Agua Dulce). The communities are opposed to the implementation of this large-scale economic project. We are concerned about the safety of the members of this community and in particular Ms. Geraldine Balanta. We find it highly problematic that the area has been militarized and that human rights abuses are being committed in order to subdue and displace the locals to implement this development project.

**Security Situation of Carlos Julio Hernandez, oil palm trade unionist with SINTRAIMAGRA**

Mr. Hernandez works in the oil palm sector in the llanos orientales. He is the current President of the Villavicencio Chapter of SINTRAIMAGRA. He was threatened in person by a couple on a motorcycle on February 7 and received a written death threat on February 20. The second threat that arrived in his home came after he participated in a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce of Meta where oil palm industrialists were present.

We respectfully ask that you take steps to guarantee the safety of all the human rights, labor rights, land rights and IDP advocates mentioned in this letter.

We thank you in advance for your consideration and look forward to your response.

Best,  
Gimena Sanchez  
Senior Associate for the Andes  
WOLA

CC: Claudia Cuevas, Third Secretary