



Massacre of Five Awá Internally Displaced Persons Underscores the Need for Improved Protection Mechanisms for Colombia's Indigenous and IDPs

(Washington, DC August 17, 2006) - On August 9, 2006, while most Native Peoples around the globe celebrated World Indigenous Day, a terrible tragedy was unfolding in Altaquer village located in Colombia's Nariño Department. According to reports, nine heavily armed hooded men in camouflage entered Altaquer, conducted house-to-house searches, and dragged five internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the homes where they had sought refuge from fighting.

The men then proceeded to shoot five persons, three men and two women, who formed part of the Awá indigenous nation from the Chagui Chinbuza reservation. The victims were later identified as Jesus Chagui Chamбуza, Mauricio Burbano, Jairo Ortiz, Marleny Pai and Adelaida Ortiz. These five IDPs formed part of a larger group of 1,700 Awá from the villages of Altaquer and Ricaurte. This group was forced to flee their tribal lands last month en masse due to heavy combat between the Colombian military and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas.

The five victims were registered as IDPs. According to Law 387 of 1997, such persons are entitled to protection and assistance from state authorities. Just one day before the killings, a Verification Commission was to meet to discuss the possible return of the Awá indigenous people back to their land. In response to this tragedy, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has called on the Colombian Government "to fulfill its duty to protect all its citizens."

The murder of these five Awá members is just the latest in a string of violence plaguing the indigenous peoples of Nariño Department. According to the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), thirty-two indigenous persons have been murdered since the beginning of this year, another twelve have been kidnapped and twenty-eight others were forcibly disappeared.

The U'Wa Defense Project at Amazon Watch, American Friends Service Committee, and the Washington Office on Latin America are greatly saddened by this recent massacre. Our organizations ask that Members of the U.S. Congress make stopping violence against indigenous Colombians a priority issue and take action to protect civilians and internally displaced persons from further harm. The Colombia Government is urged to conduct a formal and impartial investigation into the murder of these five Awá IDPs and to hold accountable those responsible for this crime. Civilian and military authorities are asked to respect the life and integrity of the Awá indigenous people, and to guarantee the territorial autonomy of indigenous persons throughout this country. Further, the international community and Colombian authority must work with internally displaced leaders to urgently implement effective protection mechanisms for the country's internally displaced civilians.

For further information please contact:

Natalia Cardona
Senior Associate
Peacebuilding Latin America Caribbean Program
American Friends Service Committee
Tele: (215) 241-7162
Email: NCardona@afsc.org

Gimena Sanchez-Garzoli
Senior Associate for Colombia and Haiti
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
Tele: (202) 797-2171
Email: gsanchez@wola.org

Andrew Fandino
Project Coordinator
U'wa Defense Project at Amazon Watch
Tele: (415) 487-9600 ext. 24
Email: andrew@amazonwatch.org