

June 27, 2008

Dear Foreign Policy Aides,

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals who follow the human rights situation of Afro-Colombians, are greatly concerned to learn about the assassination of Felipe Landazury, Secretary General of the Community Council of Bajo Mira and Frontera in the Municipality of Tumaco, Nariño.

The preliminary information received from our Afro-Colombian partners indicates that on Tuesday, June 24th, 2008 alleged paramilitaries entered the village of Candelilla de la Mar, seized Felipe and held the community captive. After two hours the armed group released the community with the exception of Felipe Landazury. As the members of the community were released, they heard gunshots. Persons who later returned to the site found that Felipe Landazury was killed. Felipe Landazury was a prominent Afro-Colombian leader appointed by the community to be the next President of the Community Council. Felipe, was a known to be adamantly opposed to palm oil cultivation in the collective territories.

The members of the Community Council of Bajo Mira and Frontera strongly oppose illicit crops, aerial fumigation and palm oil cultivation in their collective territories because these entice violence and threats from the illegal armed groups operating in the area. Tumaco is a municipality severely affected by fumigations and armed encounters between government armed forces, paramilitaries and guerrilla groups. These actions continuously generate the internal displacement of the local population, the majority of whom are Afro-descendants.

It is important to consider that additional killings have recently taken place in other majority Afrodescendant communities. El Tiempo[i] recently reported that several members of the village "La Playita" located on the San Juan River, Chocó were killed on June 11th. The victims of this incident which included Juan Paulino, Moreno, Lizardo Acevedo, Tirso Vallecilla and Luciano Moreno were found by their families in a common grave. According to Dagoberto Moreno, the Mayor of Litoral del San Juan, four bodies were found in May and nine persons were killed in April. Those massacres have caused displaced 94 villagers, including 25 children. Furthermore, on May 22nd, indigenous leader and ex-governor of the Cabildo of Francisco Pizarro and an Afro-Colombian man traveling with him were found dead in the San Juan area.

Atrocities against Afro-Colombians continue to occur even as the Uribe Administration claims that paramilitaries are dismantling their structures and that the human rights situation in Colombia is improving. The Colombian authorities want to divert attention from these killings and the recent wave of threats against human rights defenders and ethnic community leaders who oppose the proposed Colombia FTA.

We kindly ask that you contact the Colombian Embassy and the Director of the

Colombian Human Rights Presidential Program, to express your concern regarding the murder of Felipe Landazury and others. We also urge that you ask the Colombian authorities to immediately implement measures to protect the community members of Bajo Mira and Frontera.

Additionally, we encourage you to:

* Publicly express your concerns over Felipe Landazury's murder and the grave security situation of the other members of the Afro-Colombian community councils in Nariño who oppose the aerial fumigation program, as well as the cultivation of illicit crops and palm oil in their collective territories.

* Ask the Colombian government to initiate an immediate, exhaustive and impartial investigation into the assassination of Felipe Landazury and other members of the Community Councils located in the Pacific Coast.

* Ensure that USAID funding does not support palm oil cultivation in the collective territories of Afro-Colombian communities.

For more information please contact Charo Mina Rojas of AFRODES USA at (434) 760-0663 or Gimena Sanchez-Garzoli of WOLA at (202) 797-2171.

Respectfully,

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