

## **Biographical Information on Thirteen Afro-Colombian Grassroots Community Leaders, June 2006 Delegation to Washington, DC**

**Ayda Orobio Granja** serves as Coordinator for the Central Pastoral Corporation of Afro-Colombians (CEPAC). CEPAC works to strengthen Afro-Colombian identity and Afro-Colombian human and ethnic rights. Prior to CEPAC, Ayda served as advisor to the General Community Council of the middle, lower, and coastal zones of San Juan (ACADESAN), which in 2001 won title to 683,591 hectares of land in the Chocó region. She has contributed to various books, including *History of the Afro-Colombian Population: Pastoral Perspectives, Cuban-African Descent and African-American Theology*.

**Carlos Rosero** is head of the National Coordinating Body of the Black Communities Process (PCN), an umbrella organization of Afro-Colombian community groups from the Caribbean and Pacific coasts including the valleys of Pati, Magdalena and Cauca. PCN works to defend the rights of Afro-Colombians in the areas of development, identity, political participation, and land. PCN is a member of the United Nations' Afro-Colombian working group.

**Esildo Pacheco** has served as community leader for the General Community Board of the Baudo River and its Tributaries (ACABA) since 1984. Esildo has worked as civil servant in diverse institutions of the Colombian government, including the Corporation for the Development of Chocó (CODECHOCO), the Institute for Agrarian Reform (INCORA), and the Institute for Environmental Investigations of the Pacific (IIAP).

**Geiler Gustavo Romaña** is President of the Association of Internally Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES). AFRODES has played a fundamental role in defense of Afro-Colombian territorial, cultural, economic, environmental and equal rights. AFRODES recently presented an extensive report on Afro-Colombian land rights to the Organization of American States (OAS).

**Julio Montaña Montenegro** is founder of the Artistic Corporation "Ecos del Pacífico" (CADEP) and a member of the Black Communities Process (PCN). He is currently living in exile in Chicago, Illinois due to threats against his life in Colombia.

**Luz Dary Valencia** represents the Youth Movement of Nariño (Iscuande) and the Community Council of the Coast (UNICOSTA). The youth movement is composed of more than 60 youth leaders from different Afro-Colombian sectors, including the internally displaced, high-risk youth, Afro-Colombian culture promoters and human rights defenders.

**Manuel Casseres** serves as Secretary General of the General Collective of Attorneys for the Defense of Human Rights of Black Populations. He is also a member of Palenque Libre, a grassroots Afro-Colombian community organization that promotes the social, political, economic, and Afro-cultural reintegration of Afro descendant communities along the Caribbean Pacific coast.

**Maria Fabiola Triviño Cortes** has worked for over 10 years conducting workshops for Afro-Colombian women who have been affected by internal violence, massacres, and forced displacement. She is an advisor to Black Colombia, an organization that supports displaced Afro-Colombian female heads of household through workshops that teach alternative methods of subsistence and national solidarity. Black Colombia participates actively in the District Advisory Board of Cali and works in coordination with other Afro-Colombian organizations such as the Black Communities Process (PCN).

**Marino Cordoba** is Founder and first President of the Association of Internally Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES). After years of community activism and organizing of Afro-Colombian communities in Chocó and Bogotá, Marino was forced to flee Colombia in 2002 and seek exile in the United States as a result of multiple attempts on his life. He currently serves as the international representative of AFRODES in Washington, DC.

**Martha Arboleda Ortiz** is a school teacher, instructor, and dancer with the Artistic Corporation “Ecos del Pacífico” (CADEP). Because of human rights work, she was under threat in Colombia and has moved to the United States for the time being.

**Otto Marco Saja** works with Afro-Colombian communities on the Pacific coast of Nariño and is a member of the Network of Community Councils of the South Pacific (RECOMPAS). RECOMPAS works for the defense of Afro-Colombian territorial and community rights. Otto’s leadership resulted in the titling of 14 collective land titles for 250,000 hectares of land that benefit 59,000 citizens. Otto also contributed to developing governance strategies for communities with collective land titles in “Ten Life Plans: The Route to Ethno-Development in Afro-Colombian Communities of the South Pacific Coast.”

**Yolanda Garcia** is a technical specialist in rural development and has worked for more than 15 years organizing Afro-Colombian rural communities. She is currently the legal representative of the Association for the Defense of the Black Culture and Environment (ASO MANOS NEGRA), which represents more than 30 different ethnic organizations, ten Community Councils, 16 groups of Afro-Colombian women, and five youth groups throughout the Pacific region. Ms. Garcia was the Operating Secretary for the project that later resulted in the passage of law 70 of 1993. In 1999 she was awarded by the President of the Republic of Colombia through the Office on Women’s Equality for her work for peace.

**Zulia Mena** was the first Afro-Colombian Congresswoman and is currently the leader of the Organization of Popular Neighborhoods of the Chocó (OBAPO). Zulia has attended conferences in Europe, the U.S., and throughout South America, speaking about the situation of Afro-Colombians, human rights of ethnic minorities, women in Colombia, land rights, and citizen participation in democracy, among other themes. Published in various books and magazines and interviewed in newspapers such as the *New York Times*, Zulia has received many awards for her commitment to community organizing.