

## **Murders and Threats Against Afro-Colombian Leaders and Communities 2009<sup>1</sup>**

### **Murders:**

- On January 26<sup>th</sup> 2009, three Afro-Colombian bodies were found floating in the river flowing out of the Guapi-Cauca municipality, Cauca Department. The bodies were later identified as fishermen from the settlement of Saija located in Timbiqui Municipality. The persons killed were Eliseo Castro, Wiston Hurtado Quintero and Richard Hurtado Quintero. Although there is insufficient information to know the motives of the crime it is worth noting that the area is a hot zone for all the armed groups (military, paramilitary, and guerrilla) and serves as a contested zone for the narcotics trade.

-Odulfo Mosquera Orejuela, a local Afro-Colombian leader, was killed in the basin of Cacarica by the FARC, February 10, 2009.

-Ana Isabel Gomez Perez, President of Junta de Desplazados del Municipio de los Cordobas (Cordoba) and member of the Committee of Family Victims of Cordoba (Comfavic), was killed April 14, 2009. Ms. Isabel is originally from the Chocó.

-Claudia Fernanda Ramos Camacho, an Afro-Colombian teacher in Rio Mira hired by CRIC, was killed on April 19, 2009.

-On May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009 a helicopter of the Colombian military indiscriminately machine-gunned several areas where Afro-Colombian communities reside in the Lopez de Micay municipality. Among the victims there was a thirteen year old boy, Aureliano Tovar, who was shot. The community demanded that the military, at least, take the boy to a nearby hospital to seek treatment. Although Cali has a better emergency response centers, the military took the ailing boy to Pasto. Aureliano died May 6<sup>th</sup> due to severe gun shot wounds. As a consequence of the military's actions, members of the Afro-Colombian communities have received threats.

-On May 4<sup>th</sup> 2009 a typist from the Ministry of Education of Tumaco was murdered on her way to work. Unofficial estimates claim that in Tumaco in 2009 at least one person a day has been killed. This comes in spite of heavy policing and military operatives by the local and national government. Locals suspect that these authorities have been infiltrated by criminal groups and are thus ineffective.

-Estrella Hinestroza Robayo, leader of ASODESS and IDP women's advocate, was killed in Granada Meta, May 20, 2009.

-Otavio Castaño, from the municipality of Guapi in Cauca, had been missing since June 6<sup>th</sup> 2009 and was assumed kidnapped. The morning of June 11<sup>th</sup> residents of the neighborhood discovered that Mr. Castaño had been murdered with a chainsaw when

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<sup>1</sup> Compiled by WOLA.

they found pieces of his body. The killing was allegedly committed by the paramilitary group “Los Rastrojos” who had previously extorted Mr. Castaño for money.

### **Threats:**

-Afro-Colombian sisters Johana and Elena Acosta won a racial discrimination lawsuit against two nightclubs in Cartagena. On February 4th 2009, after three years in court, the defendants were found guilty and forced to pay the Acosta sisters 100 million pesos. Since then the sisters and their lawyer, Francisco Hernandez, have received violent phone calls threatening them *“hey corrupt lawyer, son of a bitch, you are going to die before you see a single dime of that money!”*

-Afro-Colombian partners in Buenaventura informed us on March 10, 2009 that a paramilitary group was distributing pamphlets announcing that persons deemed undesirable by the paramilitaries (drug dealers, thieves, prostitutes, etc.) will be “socially cleansed.” We find this development to be particularly disturbing given the paramilitary demobilization process and recent efforts by the Colombian authorities to increase the presence of the military in this port city.

Recent interviews done by WOLA in June with victims from Buenaventura indicated that the threat remains and that paramilitaries have taken actions (killings and disappearances) against persons, their family members are too afraid to report these violations to the authorities.

-On March 13, 2009 Adom, Adacho, Asociación Orewa, Asociaciones Comunales, Codegeved, Comisión Nacional de Reparación, Cocomacia, Defensoría del Pueblo, Diócesis de Quibdó, Fedutch, Foro Interétnico Solidaridad Chocó, Mujer y Vida, Oficina departamental de Paz, Personería de Quibdó, Red departamental de Mujeres Chocoanas. Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres and Unión Desplazada Del Chocó are asking that action is taken regarding pamphlets containing death threats against civil society organizations in Quibdó and Chocó.

These organizations are concerned about the threat of death and harm that exists against them and others, as well as, the terror campaign that paramilitaries are orchestrating against the civilian population. They note that paramilitaries are threatening to individually and collectively kill, persecute massacre ethnic leaders in order to impose their economic, political and military projects in the region. They are especially concerned for the welfare of the large number of IDPs situated in Quibdó and their leaders since this population is very vulnerable to attack.

-In April 2009, Afro-Colombian IDP leaders Erlendy Cuero Bravo, delegate of AFRODES to the National Coordination Table on IDPs (CND) and Ricauter Angulo, Coordinator, National Municipal Table of IDPs in Cali, situated in Cali received pamphlets from the Black Eagles threatening them for their working in defending victims’ rights.

-Senator Piedad Cordoba, Afro-Colombian Senator threatened by the Black Eagles paramilitaries, in pamphlets distributed May 2009.

- On May 29, 2009, a strange man entered the office of the Municipal Association of Women (ASOM), an affiliate of the Black Communities Process (PCN) in La Balsa community, Buenos Aires Municipality in Cauca. The unknown man entered the office and began to ask for well-known Afro-Colombian advocate Clemencia Carabalí. When he was informed that she was not in the office, the man told the other women in the office that *“she should watch out for her family and not involve herself in what does not pertain to her.”* The same threat was made to Liliana Sandoval of ASOM, once the man determined that she worked with Clemencia. Various Afro-Colombian women advocates from ASOM have received similar cellphone threats.

-On May 31st 2009 in Vigia del Fuerte, Antioquia, various threatening and accusatory pamphlets were distributed. These pamphlets falsely accuse and threaten the life of missionary Jose Nelly Mena, among others. The Dioceses of Quibdo urges local and national authorities to make a full investigation and punish the material and intellectual actors of this crime. Additionally, they ask for the proper mechanisms to ensure the safety of Jose Nelly Mena and other religious leaders.

-Hugo Rivera Aquíñonez is the legal representative for the IDP association “El Porvenir” in the municipality of Tumaco. On Sunday June 14<sup>th</sup> 2009, two unknown individuals were searching for Mr. Rivera with the intent of murdering him. Mr. Rivera was able to escape with the help of neighbors and family members.

### **Security Issues Concerning Members of AFRODES in Bogotá**

In recent months the Association of Internally Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES) has received numerous threats and been subjected to strange and menacing persons coming to their office. It is recommended that Carlos Franco of the Vice President’s office meet with the core members of AFRODES to discuss their security situation and develop actions that can be taken to ensure their safety.

AFRODES played a key role in helping the Colombian Constitutional Court gather the information necessary to do its hearing on Afro-Colombian IDPs. This hearing led to the Order issued by the Court in January 2009 that orders the Colombian State to take actions to reverse the poor situation faced by Afro-Colombian IDPs. AFRODES also recently released a joint report with Global Rights on the situation of Afro-Colombian IDP women that provides useful information and recommendations for how the particular concerns of such women can be addressed.

### **Other Reports:**

- The Noanamito Afro-Colombian community of Lopez de Micay (Cauca Department) reported in January 2009 an increase in paramilitary presence in their area

and increased activities on the part of the “New Generation” paramilitaries. They fear that the increased presence of this group is going to lead to human rights abuses.

- On June 25, President Uribe ordered that 12,000 members of the Colombian armed forces “recover from the FARC” the territories surrounding the River Naya (Valle del Cauca Department). It is believed that for every inhabitant in this area there will now be two soldiers. The Afro-Colombian Community Council of the River Naya are deeply concerned and reject the notion that these territories are serve as a “sanctuary for guerillas and narcos.” Approximately 18,570 Afro-Colombians and indigenous persons from the ethnic group Epera Siapidara inhabit this area. They fear that this military incursion will lead to deaths and new internal displacements because in February 28, 2008 these communities were subjected to aerial bombardments that damaged properties and led to displacement. Further, 30% of this population depends on growing banana, plantain, papa china, corn and cacao for its subsistence and there is concern that this militarization will obstruct their right to freedom of movement and thus their ability to sustain themselves.

- The 24<sup>th</sup> of January the 10<sup>th</sup> regiment of the Colombian Marines allegedly seized a shipment containing ACPM, the fuel needed for electricity in the lower part of the Saija Community Council (Cauca Department). Due to the outdated infrastructure of the Afro-Colombian community of Saija, the electricity generator plant depends on a daily dose of ACPM. Without ACPM the community has no electricity and this creates great discomfort and insecurity in a region affected by armed groups. The Marines did not explain why they seized the fuel from the Afro-Colombian community. Moreover, ACPM has no other known use which discards the argument that its seizure was an attempt to fight the guerrillas. After pressuring them for a response, the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, the Marines claim that the seizure came as a result of the transportation vehicle not having proper documentation and license plate (for which we the community was subsequently fined). It should be noted that the transportation vehicle used was our traditional canoe for which there is no clear and explicit policy regarding its mobilization and documentation.