

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 21, 2017

Hon. President Juan Manuel Santos
Republic of Colombia
Casa de Nariño
Bogotá, Colombia

Dear President Santos:

Given the grave security conditions, on-going death threats and murders of social and ethnic leaders in Colombia, the undersigned members of the U.S. Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) urge you to take bold measures to guarantee the life and well-being of threatened individuals and aggrieved Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities. Specifically, we request your government to reevaluate the protective measures it employs to these threatened individuals and the aggrieved Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities to form a strategy that best protects their life, interests, and safety. Please indicate the NGOs and other organizations that you will partner with to achieve these ends. Additionally, we request that you answer the three specific questions outlined below to better assist these communities. Given that the world is watching, we request that every effort be taken to advance these communities' interests and do all that is possible to protect human lives.

On December 14, Fernando Carrillo Flórez, Procurador General de Colombia (Chief Inspector General) called on national authorities to do their utmost to protect over 20 ethnic and social leaders, land rights claimants and human rights defenders residing in the Chocó region who are at risk of being killed because of their activism. The country has already experienced the murder of two land claimants in Chocó during this month. In other regions in the Pacific coast such as Cauca and Nariño—regions mainly inhabited by ethnic minorities—social leaders are severely threatened. The CBC is very concerned about the ineffective actions taken by Colombian authorities to protect their lives especially because the human rights conditions for U.S. military assistance to Colombia specify that the Colombian armed forces must protect human rights defenders and ethnic social leaders.

We, therefore, ask the national government to reevaluate the type of protection measures it is giving these leaders and communities, in conjunction with their leadership in order to develop a joint strategy that works better in guaranteeing their security. It is worth stressing that it is precisely these leaders and communities that are vital to building peace in these conflictive regions. Without effective partnerships between the Colombian entities and these brave men and women, it will be impossible to gain participation from the communities required to consolidate peace. Efforts to improve social investment,

repair the damage, allow for non-repetition of violence and forced displacement, obtain truth, and address the causes of conflict, violence and drug trade have been thwarted.

We take this opportunity to highlight various cases of particular concern. These include various Afro-Colombian Community Councils and their leaders, specifically the Community Council of the La Larga and Tumarado-COCOLATU. The entire Bajo Atrato region that has witnessed the killing of four of its leaders: Porfirio Jaramillo Bogallo, on January 29, Jesús Alberto Sánchez Correa, on August 19, Mario Manuel Castaño Bravo, on November 26 and Hernan Bedoya on December 8. The list of those murdered includes 20 cases of land rights claimants in the past 6 years.

Current leaders who are under threat also face major obstacles to acquiring adequate protection measures. Emigdio Pertuz Buendía, a recognized Afro-Colombian leader and legal representative of the Community Council of the Acandi River Basin and North Coastal Zones - COCOMANORTE - had his measures withdrawn by the director of the National Protection Unit (Unidad Nacional de Protección, UNP) through Resolution 7591 of November 16, 2017. This entity's original protection scheme—a vehicle and a bodyguard—was reduced to a bulletproof vest and a cellphone. These measures are not adequate and consistent with region as the hot climate makes it impossible to wear a bulletproof vest, and there is little signal coverage to use a cellphone. In addition, the warning made by the UNP to Mr. Pertuz is disturbing because it states "... there is no appeal against the aforementioned Resolution No. 7591 of 2017."

The many murders of indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders in their territories without effective action by the government to reinforce the security and protection of these communities and their leaders are also perturbing. Colombia has experienced recent massacres in Magui Payan and Tumaco in Nariño and numerous murders of social leaders. Given this, it is shocking that the response to the security conditions facing leaders of Belén de Bajirá-Chocó— Amauri Antonio Arteaga, Leopoldino Perea and Henry Chaverra Robledo—are that of two armored vehicles for only three people who carry out their work in different locations of the region, and are often left without an adequate security protection plan. Worst of all, one of the two vehicles has not worked since it was delivered in June 2017.

Furthermore, we remain troubled about the authorities' silence in the case of the murder of Mr. Bernardo Cuero Bravo, a leader in National Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians (Asociación Nacional de Afrocolombianos Desplazados-AFRODES). Six months have passed since he was murdered and no new information is available on the course of the investigation to clarify this crime. If there is no justice for the killing of Afro-Colombian leaders, the greenlight is given to perpetrators to continue to exterminate them.

Given the above we ask that your government:

1. Explain to us why Afro-Colombian and other social leaders in the Pacific region, in particular, Chocó, are given the measures they are provided. These protection measures must protect their lives and guarantee their community work.

2. In the case of the Belén de Bajirá-Chocó leaders—Amauri Antonio Arteaga, Leopoldino Perea and Henry Chaverra Robledo—it is requested that each of them be assigned a security protection plan that allows them to travel and guarantees their personal safety.

3. In accordance with decree 2078 of December 7, 2017, which outlines methods for collective protection that can guarantee the rights to life, integrity, freedom and personal safety of groups and communities, we request that the national government discuss with communities collective measures according to their region and culture. For example, in regions where the climate is hot, it is not appropriate for one to wear a bulletproof vest as a security measure. We also call for the inclusion of the ethnic and cultural perspectives in matters of security, and to take into account the Ethnic Chapter that calls on the strengthening of the security systems of ethnic peoples, recognized at national and international levels including the Indigenous and Cimarron Guards (Guardia Indígena and Cimarron). It is important that the UNP train young people from ethnic minority communities to be hired as bodyguards. This will give the recipients of protective measures greater confidence and security.

We look forward to your timely response and on-going dialogue with you about these important human rights cases.

Sincerely,



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress



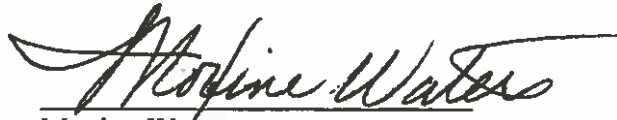
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Keith Ellison
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress