



September 8, 2008

Dear Foreign Policy Aides,

We would like to bring to your attention the resent wave of recurring threats, harassment and deaths occurring against Afro-Colombian leaders and human rights defenders. We are particularly concern with the grave developments of events in the Bajo Atrato river region, in the department of Choco, where the devolution of illegally expropriated land to cultivate oil palm, to internally displaced Afro-Colombians, have been the motivation of permanent harassment and threat to members of the Peace Community and the human rights organizations who accompany the process.

Some very disturbing events have been denounced by the NGO Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP), in spite of which, since August 24th, some members have been receiving threatening phone calls from persons who identified themselves as pertaining to the “Black Eagles” paramilitaries. On Wednesday, September 3rd, the phone calls escalated to direct harassment in the person of Yimmi Armando Jansansoy Muñoz, member of CIJP in Curvarado. According with information from the area:

“At 3:00 pm, Yimmi Armando Jansasoy (..), was detained by armed men in Chigorodo bus terminal. The men forced him, at gunpoint, to get into a truck where he was made to lie face down. They threatened him and told him to provide the names of those who live in the humanitarian zones, and information about their families. The armed men photographed him, photographed his identity document and confiscated his cellphones. Yimmy Jansasoy was told that he had until Sunday August 7th at 10:00 am to provide the information or him and his family would bear the consequences (‘Si usted no cumple ya sabe lo que le va a pasar a usted y su familia, ya tenemos todos sus datos’). After approximately an hour Yimmy Jansasoy was released and left the area”.

On Saturday 6th, Yimmi Armando and Eduard Mina Cuero received again telephone death threats. In two weeks, members of the CIJP have received seven death threats and the detention of one of its members.

Such actions are a well known path to loss of lives. Already the illegal groups have sentenced that “with or without military protection (they) are going to kill (the persons

threaten)". AFRODES USA is seriously concerned for the integrity of Yimmi Armando and other members of the human rights group.

We urge you to intervene with Colombian government to provide immediate secure conditions and protection of the lives of the members of CIJP menaced, and for human rights organizations active in the Bajo Atrato Region.

We also ask that you urge the Colombian government to speed up the devolution of all the collective lands expropriated by force and intimidation, to their legal owners, such is the case of Jiguamiando y Curvarado, and that the government guarantees the safety of the communities and leaders.

Please recommend to the Colombian government to carry out a full investigation to clarify the facts and to sanction those responsible for these threats and harassment.

Attached you will find more detailed information on events that have cost massive internal displacement, and the lives of Afro-Colombians and Indigenous persons between January and September 2008.

For further information, please contact Charo Mina Rojas at (434) 760-0663 or Marino Cordoba at (240) 350-2903.

Respectfully,

Marino Cordoba
Eunice Escobar
Charo Mina Rojas
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APPENDIX

Threats, assassinations, massacres and internal displacement of Afro-Colombians between January and September 2008ⁱ

In the first half of this year, diverse media and human rights organizations as well as grassroots organizations and leaders have reported the permanent presence of Colombia's various armed groups in parts of the country inhabited by Afro-descendant and Indigenous peoples. The paramilitary groups, known as, "Las Águilas Negras" and "Los Rastrojos," are generating terror in the Departments of Magdalena, Córdoba, Antioquia, Chocó, Valle del Cauca, Cauca, and Nariño, and in major cities such as the case of Bogotá. Leaders and human rights defenders are falsely labeled as "military objectives" by the paramilitaries because of the work they do. Several leaders who are under threat are members of internally displaced (IDP) organizations. Armed confrontations between military forces and the illegal armed groups ELN and FARC continue to place Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples in imminent danger. In the first eight months of 2008, the actions of armed groups have continued to generate internal displacement. In the Department of Chocó alone, CODHES has registered over one thousand newly displaced IDPs. The humanitarian situation for IDPs is especially grave in the southern part of the Pacific coast, with Lopez de Micay municipality (Cauca) and the entire Department of Nariño, particularly affected.

Below you will find a chronological listing of human rights violations committed against Afro-Colombians and NGOs that work to support Afro-Colombian territorial rights:

January

1. OSMIRA MELENDEZ MARQUEZ, coordinator of the group Cimarron in Cartagena and operational assistant of the Center for Justice and Action against Racism (CJAR) received various death threats via text messages on her cell phone. On January 12th, the Center's office was vandalized.
2. January 14⁻ Two people were murdered and eight detained when a paramilitary group raided the town of Santa Mónica in the municipality of Istmina, in the Department of Chocó. This aggression caused the internal displacement of 120 people.
3. January 14⁻ CODHES reported that 380 people, belonging to 77 families became internally displaced and fled towards the municipality of Istmina. According to the daily newspaper, *Chocó 7 Dias*, members of this community reported that the displacement was caused by an armed confrontation between the armed groups and the disappearance of 4 people from the Playa Bonita districtⁱⁱ.
4. On May 15⁻ An agricultural worker and teacher were kidnapped and apparently murdered by the FARC at a blockade located in San Jose del Tapaje, in the municipality of El Charco. It is presumed that these persons were murdered.
5. January 25- In Rio Naya, Buenaventura municipality, Department of Valle del Cauca, three youths, one of them a member of a grassroots ecclesiastical community, were taken from their homes and disappeared. According to members of this community, they were murdered.

In the municipality of Turbo, Department of Antioquia, located in the bordering areas with the Department of Chocó, a paramilitary group that calls itself “Las Águilas Negras” controlled the entry of foods to the collective territory of Cacarica, where the Humanitarian Zone “Nueva Vida” is found.ⁱⁱⁱ

March

1. March 19th At 1:00 p.m. the legal representative of the Community Council of Rio Naya, Buenaventura municipality (Valle del Cauca), ISABELINO VALENCIA RODALLEGA and the human rights defenders from the NGO Commission of Peace and Justice FRANKLIN WILLIAM CALLAPUR DELGADO, EDWARD MINA CUERO and ARMANDO JANSASOY MUNOZ received written death threats signed by the paramilitary group that calls itself “Para-El Naya Águilas Negras.”
2. March 26th Planes from the Colombian Air Force bombarded the collective territory of Rio Sigui, in the municipality of Lopez de Micay, in the Department of Cauca. Twenty-five people, including a minor, suffered burns, fractures and bruises caused by the explosions. The incident occurred at 9:00 a.m., at the time when the farmers are typically working in the fields. The reasons for the explosions are unknown.

May

1. May 18th The presence of the paramilitary group who call themselves “Las Águilas Negras” was reported in the town known as La Tapa, within the Afro-Colombian collective territory of Cacarica, in the municipality of Turbo, Antioquia, where there is an almost permanent military post of the sea battalion.
2. May 19th The inhabitants of this zone reported the mobilization of the paramilitary group and the 17th Brigade of the Colombian Armed Forces and, between May 20th and May 23rd, gunshots and machine gun shots were heard. This suggests an armed confrontation at a point known as “Quebrada Maluca”, in the indigenous reserve territory Bekera Perancho. The communities found themselves confined without the possibility of leaving their farmhouses to go into town until May 27th.
3. May 27th Members of the Peace Community CAVIDA, from the Cacarica Humanitarian Zone, were informed by shopkeepers and conveyors that “Las Águilas Negras” had restricted the sale and transport of supplies into the humanitarian zone. This control has existed in the town of Turbo since January.
4. May 22nd VIRGELINA CHARA, director of the organization Asomujer y Trabajo was warned by an unknown man that if she didn't leave the town and stop doing human rights work that she would be killed along with her family. Virgelina Chara was previously displaced by paramilitary violence in the region of Norte de Cauca.
5. May 22nd In the creek El Tigre of Agua Clara District, municipality of Docordo, community members found the bodies of Afro descendant RODRIGO LOPEZ and Indigenous woman Waunan Ovidio Malaga, former governor of Cabildo de Puerto Pizario, who had disappeared the day before. The municipality of Docordo is located in the lower zone of the San Juan River, in the Department of Chocó, where the territorial control is disputed over by guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers. The zone is patrolled by members of the Bahía Malaga Naval Base, located some kilometers from this headquarter. Four more people were reported as

disappeared that day. On June 11th, these four people of African descent's remains were found in a common grave.

June

1. June 1st: At 2:00 pm, on the 4th kilometer on the highway to Quibdó, Chocó, three men were kidnapped at a FARC roadblock, among them a 17 year old minor.
2. Between June 3rd and June 27th, men that identified themselves as members of "Águilas Negras" were controlling the passage of goods in Turbo and Tumarado where they maintain roadblocks.
3. The media registered five explosions in 72 hours during the first week of June in the municipality of Buenaventura. Buenaventura is one of the most important commercial ports of the country, and the government has a concentrated military presence in this municipality.
4. June 11th: The newspaper *El Tiempo* reported the displacement of 94 of the 170 inhabitants of the Playita District, Bajo San Juan. There were 25 children among this group of internally displaced persons.
5. June 24th: The radio station *Caracol* reported the displacement of 100 people from the Bajo San Juan zone to Buenaventura. The port of Buenaventura, in the Department of Valle, is one of the towns most affected by the violence between the illegal and legal armed groups. More than forty-thousand people are in a state of internal displacement in this port.
6. June 24th: FELIPE LANDAZURY, the community leader and Secretary General of the Community Council of Bajo Mira and Frontera, was murdered in the District of Candelilla del Mar, municipality of Tumaco, in the Department of Nariño. It is believed that the act was committed by paramilitaries. This armed group detained Felipe and the community of Candelilla for two hours, after which they freed the detainees, except for Felipe who was found dead shortly after.
7. The Community Council of the Pacific South is opposed to the cultivation of coca and palm oil (among other mono-crop farming) in the region. Their opposition has earned them permanent harassment from the armed groups in the zone.
8. June 29th: MARIA CECILIA OBANDO, a recognized leader in Buenaventura and President of the Association of Displaced Women from the Neighborhood San Francisco (AFRODESAN) and member of the Local Network of Mothers for Life, was murdered. Marta Cecilia had been displaced from the municipality of Iscuande, Nariño, where she acted as director of the Office of Gender and Women of the Mayor's Office in Iscuande in the year 2000.
9. June 30th: The NGO Justice and Peace publicly denounced the blockage of goods, restricted mobilization of the population and armed confrontations between the guerrilla group, self-titled "Las Águilas Negras" and the armed forces, in the Humanitarian Zone of "Nueva Vida" located within the Afrodescendant Cacarica community in the municipality of Turbo. The Commission expressed serious concerns regarding the reappearance of paramilitaries in the zone that, in 1996, was severely affected by the paramilitary block of Elmer Cardenas. At this point, civilians with handguns ensure that the food control established by the municipality of Turbo is not evaded^{iv}.

July

1. July 11- Several members of the Afro-Colombian Community Council of the Cordillera Occidental of Nariño (Copdiconc) were detained at a paramilitary roadblock in Policarpa municipality. Two of the detained, José Arcos, Vice President of the Community Council, and María Antonia Amaya, were taken hostage by the paramilitaries. These persons were later released.
2. July 19- FARC took eighteen Afrodescendants hostage in Bebera, Middle Atrato (Choco). Eight were released hours later. The other ten were released on July 25th.

August

1. August 3- A bomb believed to be planted by the FARC leaves 5 people injured in Buenaventura (Valle del Cauca).
2. August 20- Members of the ESMAD attacked members of a miner's community in the municipality of Suarez, department of Cauca.
3. August 24- Members of the NGO Justice and Peace, working in the Humanitarian Zone of Andalucía Caño Claro in the Curvaradó river basin, municipality of Carmen del Darien, received a telephone threat from a woman claiming to be from the paramilitary group, the Black Eagles. She said "This is the Black Eagles speaking.. It is best if you leave the area, you are being watched, you need to leave right now". Members of the same organization, working in Bogota, also received threatening phone calls that day.
4. August 25- The same group of human rights defenders from Justice and Peace received a death threat phone call, also from the paramilitary group "The Black Eagles"

September

1. September 2. Aerial fumigations were reported in the municipality of Timbiqui, in the Afro-Colombian collective territories of the Community Council "Renacer Negro" and the Association of Community Councils of Timbiqui, affecting crops that are part of the Community Council's "Plan of Territorial Management", and the water aqueduct in the locality of Santa Maria.
2. September 2- A member of the NGO Justice and Peace present in Curvarado received a telephone threat to her personal cell phone. The person told her that she should leave the area or her family would be killed. The person stated to Justice and Peace: "Get out of the area or we are going to finish off your family you son of a bitch."
3. September 3- At 3pm, YIMMI ARMANDO JASANSOY MUNOZ of the NGO Justice and Peace working in Curvarado, was detained by armed men in Chigorodo bus terminal. He was threatened with death and asked to provide the names of those who live in the humanitarian zones, and information about their families. The armed men photographed him, photographed his identity document and confiscated his cellphones. Yimmy Jansasoy was told that he had until Sunday August 7th at 10.00am to provide the information or him and his family would bear the consequences ("If you do not do what we say you know what will happen to you

and your family We have all of your personal information”). After approximately an hour Yimmi Jansasoy was released and left the area.

4. September 6- YIMMI ARMANDO JASANSOY of the NGO Justice and Peace received another telephone death threat. EDUARD MINA CUERO from the same organization was also death threat this day.

ⁱ Document written by Charo Mina Rojas of AFRODES USA. Translation into English by WOLA interns. For further information on these cases please contact Charo Mina Rojas at (434) 760-0663

ⁱⁱ Muertos, Desaparecidos y Desplazados del Suruco. Noticias del San Juan. Chocó 7 Días. Edición 641. January 18 to 24 del 2008. http://www.choco7dias.com/641/noticias_del_san_juan.htm

ⁱⁱⁱ This “community of peace” is a re-settlement by Afro-descendants, Indigenous and mestizos, who, between February 24th and 27th of 1997, were forcibly displaced from their collective territories due to indiscriminate bombardments carried out by the public security forces, in a military operation so called “operation Genesis”. During the bombardment, paramilitary forces irrupted in the community of Bijao, Cacarica, hacked apart the peasant-farmer Manuel Lopez Mera and played soccer with his head in front of the terrified community. The consequence of these attacks was the displacement of 3000 people from Cacarica and 7000 from various settlements along the Atrato River. The same year, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (ICHR) sought the adoption of precautionary measures for those who were displaced to Turbo by the violence. It wasn’t until 2001 that the inhabitants were able to return to Cacarica, only to find that the tropical forest had been cleared of its hundred-year old trees, making way for large scale economic projects, such oil palm cultivation.

In spite of repeated denouncements, not one person responsible for Operation Genesis has yet been sentenced. “Operation Genesis” was commanded by General Rito Alejo del Rio, who only until this past week was detained, in allegedly connections with paramilitaries and accused of crimes of “lessa humanidad”.

^{iv} In communiqués issued in June, the NGO Justice and Peace, as well as the Bishop of Nariño, have echoed the community’s concerns evoked by the return of past paramilitary actions: armed presence, constant threats and hostility towards civil society, control over the mobilization of people inside and outside their homes, confiscation of means of transport, control over food supplies, censoring of their organizational activities, and assassinations in zones with heavy military presence. These acts have instilled terror in the Afro descendant and indigenous communities of the Pacific due to their past experience during years previous to the demobilization of the paramilitaries, which exacerbated by the action or lack thereof of the armed forces.

Other sources of information:

“Crisis in the Coast”. WOLA Blog. <http://wolablog.typepad.com/weblog/2008/09/crisis-on-the-coast.html>