

via fax: 011 57 1 337 58 90/ 342 05 92 <b>Senor Presidente Alvaro Uribe Velez</b> Presidente de la República de Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 565 7682 <b>Dr. Francisco Santos Calderon</b> Vicepresidente de la República de Colombia
via fax: 011 57 4 823 6844 <b>General Fandino Ficon Hector Jaime Carepa</b> Commander of XVII Brigade of Colombian Army	

April 22, 2005

Dear Sirs:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force, are extremely concerned for the **safety of Afro-descendant inhabitants in the Cacarica River Basin**, Riosucio Municipality, Department of Chocó, because army-backed paramilitaries have threatened to enter their communities.

At 7pm on April 10, 300 paramilitaries were seen in La Loma at the entrance to the Cacarica River Basin. They then moved to an area known as Bijao Cacarica, where they told inhabitants they were preparing to attack the "humanitarian zones." The inhabitants have repeatedly asserted their right not to be drawn into the conflict by calling on combatants in the area—whether guerrilla forces, the government armed forces or their paramilitary allies—not to enter the humanitarian zones.

On April 11, community leaders of Nueva Esperanza en Dios received a message from the paramilitaries: "we need the coordinators of the Humanitarian Zones to come voluntarily or they will be forced to come." Troops from the Colombian Army's XVII Brigade had occupied the hamlets of Nueva Esperanza until approximately April 1. Before the troops withdrew, one soldier told inhabitants that paramilitaries would be arriving in the area. Within days, the paramilitaries arrived.

We are disturbed that the government and its security forces have taken no effective action against paramilitary groups in the department of Chocó, despite repeated commitments and UN recommendations to combat and dismantle these groups. As a matter of fact, it appears that the XVII Brigade and the paramilitaries are working collaboratively to displace civilians in Chocó.

**We urge you**

- to take all measures that the communities in the Cacarica River Basin themselves deem appropriate to guarantee their safety;
- to carry out a full and impartial investigation into links between the security forces and paramilitary groups operating in the Department of Chocó, make the results public and bring to justice those found responsible for supporting and participating in such groups;
- to take immediate and decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups, in line with repeated UN recommendations.

Thank you for your prompt attention.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Coordinator

cc: Ambassador Luis Alberto Moreno , Embassy of Colombia ~ via fax: 1 202 232 8643  
 William B Wood, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011-571-315-2197  
 Heather Merritt, Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Dept ~ via fax: 202.647.2628  
 U.S. Senators DeWine and Voinovich ~ via fax, email  
 U.S. Representatives Brown, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Ryan, Tubbs Jones ~ via fax, email

UA 85/05\_Colombia

**The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter:**