

via FAX: 011 57 1 596 0631 Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos President of Colombia	via FAX: 011 57 1 381 4742 Sra. María Ángela Holguín Minister of Foreign Affairs of Colombia
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September 2, 2013

Dear Sir and Madam:

We are deeply concerned for the safety of **Elker León Cataño, Fredy Antonio Rodríguez Corrales, Lidia Liliana Vásquez Pacheco** and **José de la Cruz Trujillo**, leaders of Horizon Colombian Association of Displaced Population (ASOCOL) in San Alberto in Cesar Department. ASOCOL leaders have been threatened and attacked since April when the Colombian Institute for Rural Development (INCODER) made a ruling that could be a first step for land restitution for the 287 families who were forcibly displaced from the Hacienda Bellacruz farm in 1996.

On August 14 **Fredy Antonio Rodríguez Corrales, Lidia Liliana Vásquez Pacheco** and **José de la Cruz Trujillo** traveled to Valledupar, the capital of Cesar Department, to file a complaint with the Valledupar Human Rights Ombudsman about threats by paramilitaries. On their way home, while they were in Bucaramanga in Santander Department, a car blocked their way. Three men got out of the car and started shooting at them, but they managed to escape. When **Armando Rodríguez Corrales**, Fredy's brother, heard of the attack, he had his bodyguards search the perimeter of his house in Aguachica Municipality in Cesar Department, which is also the ASOCOL office. They found two men who appeared to be keeping the building under surveillance.

On August 20, Elker León Cataño managed to escape from his home in San Alberto, Cesar Dept., after three armed men arrived there and asked for him.

This is a longstanding dispute. In 1996 paramilitaries, with support from the Colombian armed forces, forcibly displaced 287 families from the Hacienda Bellacruz farm. Since then several of the evicted peasants, who formed ASOCOL, have been threatened, killed or forcibly displaced. The displacement happened when Marulanda Ramírez Ltd, a company representing the family of the former Colombian Minister and Ambassador to the European Union, lost a judicial appeal to reclaim part of the land. Part of the farm was later sold to another company, which is now claiming ownership; to make land restitution more difficult for the peasant farmers, the company has planted African palm. But in April 2013 INCODER ruled that part of the farm was officially "uncultivated land," which could be a first step for the land restitution for the displaced families.

Because of the continuing attacks and threats since this ruling, we **strong urge** that you

- order a full and impartial investigation into the incidents described above, as well as previous death threats, and bring those responsible to justice; and
- provide effective protection to those who request it, in strict accordance with their wishes; and

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

Copies: ASOCOL- via US mail
First Secretary for Human Rights and Minorities, Embassy of Colombia in the US ~ via fax
P. Michael McKinley, US Ambassador to Colombia ~ via fax: 011.571.275.4600
Mary Brett Rogers-Springs, Senior Desk Officer for Colombia, US State Department ~ via fax: 202.647.2628
José de Jesús Orozco Henríquez, Rapporteur for Colombia, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202.458.3992
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

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