

via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631 Excmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos President of Republic of Colombia	via fax: 011 57 1 266 1003 Sr. Juan Carlos Pinzón Minister of Defense of Colombia
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September 25, 2013

Dear Sirs:

We, members of the InterReligious Task Force on Central America, write to express our grave concern for members of the **Peace Community of San José de Apartadó** and other civilians in the area who have been threatened by Colombian soldiers and paramilitaries. One peasant farmer, **Buenaventura Hoyos Hernández**, has been subjected to enforced disappearance and dozens have been forcibly displaced. On September 11 soldiers from the Mobile Brigade 24 of the Colombian army stopped a member of the **Peace Community of San José de Apartadó** in the hamlet of La Resbalosa, Apartadó Municipality, Antioquia Department. They threatened him with a gun and told him that the Peace Community would not last long, with paramilitaries on one side and the army on the other, and the "military justice system would allow them to do what they want." He was released after half an hour.

There have been repeated reports that paramilitaries, as well as the armed forces, are in the area. Peasant farmer **Buenaventura Hoyos Hernández** was detained by paramilitaries on August 31 in the hamlet of La Hoz, nearby the Peace Community. He was last seen, tied up, on September 3, as paramilitaries were taking him away from La Hoz. His family have fled La Hoz, as have others since August 26, when paramilitaries established themselves in the hamlet; over 50 people have fled their homes. Local sources say they have seen soldiers 400 meters from the paramilitaries in La Hoz, but taking no action. Paramilitaries have been visiting several hamlets of the Peace Community, particularly in late August, asking for specific members of the Peace Community on lists of names, labeling them as guerrillas.

We have written more than 20 letters to Colombian officials since 2002 about the human rights violations of the people of the San José Peace Community. Since the Peace Community's establishment in March 1997, more than 170 of its members and other civilians living in the area have been killed or subjected to enforced disappearance.

We urge you to take the following steps in the interest of justice and human rights of your people:

- Order full and impartial investigations into the enforced disappearance of Buenaventura Hoyos Hernandez, establish his whereabouts, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Order full and impartial investigations into the forced displacements, the threats made by members of the armed forces and the threats and presence of paramilitaries, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Always keep in mind that civilians, including members of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó and other civilians in the area, have the right not to be drawn into the armed conflict; and
- Take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

Copies: First Secretary for Human Rights and Minorities, Embassy of Colombia to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643
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

UA 255_Colombia

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