

via fax: 011 57 1 596 0631  
**Exmo. Sr. Juan Manuel Santos**  
 President of Colombia

via fax: 011 57 1 266 1003  
**Sr. Juan Carlos Pinzón**  
 Defense Minister

October 26, 2013

Dear Sirs:

We are deeply concerned for the safety of Afro-descendant peoples of the Curvaradó River Basin in Chocó Department: **Andrés Lance**, a member of the community council of Caño Manso in the municipality of Carmen del Darién; **Marleny Benítez** and **Enrique Petro**, members of the neighboring community council of Pedeguita Mansilla in the municipality of Riosucio. The community councils collectively own the land titles in the region. Since the late 1990s large corporate economic interests have sought to develop large-scale African palm and cattle ranching projects within the lands recognized as part of the collective land titles.

Andrés Lance is claiming a plot of land from which he was forcibly displaced in 1997 by army-backed paramilitaries who killed his father and another family member. On October 2, Caño Manso council members entered the Andrés Lance land plot and called on the illegal occupants to leave. They saw paramilitaries nearby, while XVII Army Brigade soldiers and the regional police stood by.

On October 3, Andrés Lance was threatened by men working for one of several landowners who have seized the collective lands.

On October 4, Marleny Benítez returned with several other community members to lands they had been forced to abandon 16 years ago. She and other women were threatened with a knife by a man linked to paramilitaries. The same man had also threatened Enrique Petro, one of the leaders who is denouncing the illegal occupation of lands by economic interests linked to paramilitaries in the region and campaigning for the return of the forcibly displaced Afro-descendant communities.

This is our ninth letter to officials in Colombia in the past two years regarding threats to community leaders in the Curvaradó and/or Jiguamiandó River Basins. These latest threats occur as the Afro-descendant communities try to ensure the implementation of a new judicial ruling (Auto 299 of 18 December 2012), by which the Constitutional Court established a timeframe and criteria for the government to ensure the return of lands to the Afro-descendant communities and to remove those occupying the lands illegally.

Therefore, we **strongly urge you to**:

- provide effective protection in accordance with their wishes for Andrés Lance, Marleny Benitez, Enrique Petro and other community leaders in Pedeguita Mansilla and the Curvaradó areas;
- order a full and impartial investigation into paramilitary threats against members of the communities of Curvaradó and Pedeguita Mansilla, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice; and
- take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai, Co-Coordinator

copies: Comision Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz ~ via fax 011 571 346 3613  
 First Secretary for Human Rights and Minorities, Embassy of Colombia to the US ~ via fax: 202.232.8643  
 Andrew Bowen, Interim Deputy Chief of Mission, US Embassy in 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: 281/13

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