

# URGENT ACTION

## GOVERNMENT URGED TO HALT PARAMILITARIES

**Paramilitaries are threatening to kill Afro-descendants in the Cacarica River Basin in north-western Colombia. There is an imminent threat of forced displacement.**

On 12 September, paramilitaries reached the areas of Bijao, El Limón, and the two areas Nueva Vida and Nueva Esperanza en Dios, known as Humanitarian Zones (Zonas Humanitarias), of the Cacarica River Basin, Ríosucio Municipality, Department of Chocó. Paramilitaries have stated that they are in possession of a list of community leaders who they label as guerrilla collaborators. Those labelled as guerrilla collaborators in Colombia by the security forces or paramilitaries have frequently been the target of human rights violations including extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearance, enforced displacement and threats.

On 3 September a large number of paramilitaries had left Unguía Municipality in Chocó Department to go to the Cacarica River Basin reportedly to "teach a lesson" to the inhabitants. This incursion follows witness reports that around 100 paramilitaries were seen boarding a boat or boats in the harbour of the town of Turbo, in the neighbouring department of Antioquia, an area with a permanent strong police presence. On 9 September paramilitaries entered the Cacarica River Basin through an area known as Puente América. There are regular army checkpoints at this location; however, when the paramilitaries entered the area this checkpoint had been removed.

The Colombian government has been made aware of these paramilitary latest movements, but the authorities have failed to take decisive action to confront paramilitary forces in the area. Over many years paramilitary forces have continued to maintain a strong presence in the north of Chocó Department and to operate in close collusion with the XVII Brigade of the Colombian armed forces. This collusion has been denounced repeatedly by Colombian non-governmental human rights organizations and international NGOs from the late 1990s to the present.

### **Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:**

- Expressing concern for the Afro-descendants of the Cacarica River Basin, including their leaders, given the threats against the community and the incursion of a large number of paramilitaries into the area.
- Urging the authorities to implement protection measures in strict accordance with the wishes of those threatened, and order full and impartial investigations into these threats and the presence of paramilitaries;
- Urging them to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces, in line with stated government commitments and recommendations made by the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 25 OCTOBER 2013 TO:**

#### President

Presidente Juan Manuel Santos  
 Presidente de la República, Palacio de  
 Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26  
 Bogotá, Colombia  
 Fax: +57 1 596 0631

**Salutation: Dear President Santos/  
 Excmo Sr. Presidente Santos**

#### Defence Minister

Señor Juan Carlos Pinzón  
 Ministerio de Defensa  
 Carrera 54, no.26-29  
 Bogotá, Colombia  
 Fax: +57 1 266 1003

**Salutation: Dear Minister Pinzón/**

#### **Sr. Ministro Pinzón**

#### **And copies to:**

NGO  
 Comisión Intereclesial Justicia y Paz  
 Calle 61A, No. 17-26  
 Bogotá  
 Colombia

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.**

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
 INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In February 1997 as part of the "Operation Génesis" coordinated by the XVII Brigade, paramilitaries forcibly displaced over 3,000 members of the Afro-descendant community of the Cacarica River Basin. After several years spent in forced displacement in Turbo Municipality, Antioquia Department, and other areas, the majority of the displaced community began a process of return to the Cacarica River Basin in the early 2000s.

To guarantee their safety given the on-going death threats and human rights violations community members were facing at the hands of the security forces and paramilitaries operating with them, the community members created two "Humanitarian Zones" Esperanza en Dios and Nueva Vida and insisted on their rights as civilians not to be drawn into the conflict.

Since their return to Cacarica in the early 2000s, the Afro-descendant community has continued to face constant death threats and human rights violations. This has happened in the context of a hearing in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) in April 2013 related to "Operation Génesis". The paramilitary operations come also at a time when the Afro-descendant population is defending their rights against economic interest related to extractive industries and infrastructure projects

During Colombia's long-running armed conflict, members of human rights organizations, trade unions and other social organizations have often been labelled guerrilla collaborators or supporters by the security forces and paramilitaries. As a result they are often killed, threatened, or subjected to enforced disappearance. Guerrilla groups have also threatened or killed human rights defenders they consider to be siding with the enemy.

Name: Afro-descendent communities of the Cacarica River Basin

Gender m/f: both

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