

URGENT ACTION

AFRO-DESCENDANT PEOPLE THREATENED

Afro-descendant people forcibly displaced from their collective lands in northern Colombia have been threatened by paramilitaries as they try to reclaim their lands.

Andrés Lance is a member of the community council of the Afro-descendants who collectively own the titles to land in Curvaradó in the municipality of El Carmen del Darién, department of Chocó. He was threatened on 3 October by men working for one of several powerful landowners, who have seized the collective lands owned by Afro-descendant communities in the Curvaradó area. 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 member of his family.

The threats come as members of the community council of **Caño Manso** (who collectively own the land title of the Curvaradó River Basin) and the neighbouring Afro-descendant people (who own the land title of **Pedeguita Mansilla**, in the municipality of Ríosucio) took action to try and ensure that a Constitutional Court ruling, returning their lands, was actually implemented. The ruling calls for the implementation of a process to remove those occupying the land illegally. Caño Manso community members went onto the land claimed by Andrés Lance on 2 October and called on those working for the illegal occupants to leave. They also dismantled installations built on the lands. They reported the presence of paramilitaries nearby, while members of the XVII Brigade and the regional police stood by.

On 4 October a member of the community council of Pedeguita Mansilla, **Marleny Benitez**, 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**, who is one of the leaders 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.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety of Andrés Lance, Marleny Benítez, Enrique Petro and other community leaders in Pedeguita Mansilla and the Curvaradó areas, and urging the authorities to provide effective protection for them in accordance with their wishes;
- Calling on them to 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;
- Urging them to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 NOVEMBER 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

Juan Carlos Pinzón
 Ministerio de Defensa
 Carrera 54, no.26-29
 Centro Administrativo Nacional (CAN)
 Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: + 57 1 266 1003

Salutation: Dear Minister/

Estimado Sr. Ministro

And copies to:

NGO
 Comisión Intereclesial de 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

Afro-descendant communities, along with indigenous people and peasant farmer communities, are among those most affected by the Colombia's long-running internal armed conflict. They have been subjected to enforced disappearance by the security forces or paramilitaries – either acting alone or in collusion with the armed forces – and abducted by guerrilla groups.

In the past few years, many of those who fled their lands following their violent expulsion by paramilitaries and the security forces in the late 1990s have returned to the Afro-descendant communities of Curvaradó. The communities have sought to defend their land rights and prevent the expansion of illegal African palm plantations and other economic activities within their territory. Many of their members have been threatened and killed as a result. In the last couple of years a number of members of the Curvaradó region who have complained about the occupation of their lands by African palm growers and other economic interests have been killed by paramilitaries, who continue to maintain a strong presence in the region despite the large army presence in the area.

A report by the Colombian Institute for Rural Development (*Instituto Colombiano de Desarrollo Rural*, INCODER), published in December 2012, identified businesspeople who were illegally exploiting the land that is part of the collective territory of the Afro-descendant communities. In a new judicial ruling (Auto 299 of 18 December 2012), the Constitutional Court established a timeframe and criteria that the government should follow, to ensure the return of lands to the Afro-descendant communities. In the past, death threats and serious human rights violations have coincided with attempts by State authorities to implement court and other orders to ensure the return of misappropriated lands.

Afro-descendant people forcibly displaced from the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins in El Carmen del Darién Municipality and Pedeguita Mansilla, Ríosucio Municipality, since the late 1990s have faced repeated threats and killings at the hands of paramilitary groups operating in close collusion with the armed forces and economic interests as they attempt to reclaim their lands. The lands are located within the collective land titles granted to Afro-descendant communities in the region. These interests have sought to develop large-scale agricultural projects, including African palm and cattle ranching, within the lands recognized as part of the collective land titles of the Afro-descendant communities.

Name: Andrés Lance (m), Marleny Benítez (f), Enrique Petro (m), other members of the Afro-descendant communities
Gender m/f: both

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