

URGENT ACTION

COMMUNITY LEADER REPEATEDLY THREATENED

Yomaira Mendoza, a leader of the Afro-descendant community in the Curvaradó River Basin campaigning for collective land titles, has received repeated death threats.

On 3 and 4 March, **Yomaira Mendoza**, a leader of the Humanitarian Zone Caño Manso in Carmen del Darién Municipality, Chocó Department, in the Curvaradó River Basin, received the latest of numerous death threats by text message since January 2014. She has received up to five threats by text message on a single day. The incidents were reported and the police was requested to trace the threatening text messages, but explained they could not do this due to a new intelligence law. One of the threatening text messages Yomaira Mendoza received in the last weeks read "fighting for land, there will be more than enough on top of you" (*peleando la tierra te ba [sic] a sobrar ensima [sic]*). On 5 March Yomaira Mendoza was reportedly followed as she travelled from the region to Bogotá, the capital.

The death threats by text message started after she made a statement to the Office of the Attorney General in January. The Office of the Attorney General is advancing a criminal investigation into the misappropriation of land by powerful economic actors with the support of paramilitary groups, and related human rights violations including the killing of Yomaira Mendoza's husband José Eustoquio Cifuentes Rojas on 7 January 2007. In spite of repeated orders by the Colombian Constitutional Court to ensure the return of the collective lands to the Afro-descendant communities who were forcibly displaced in the late 1990s, no such orders have been implemented and the communities continue to face threats and intimidation.

Members of the XII Brigade of the Colombian Army who had been providing security around the perimeter of the collective lands of Caño Manso informed the Colombian government and the human rights NGO Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz) that they had left the area due to forthcoming national elections. The National Protection Unit (Unidad Nacional de Protección) have not met with Yomaira Mendoza in the Caño Manso area, explaining that it was too dangerous for them to meet her there.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety of Yomaira Mendoza, her family and other community leaders in Caño Manso and others claiming land restitution in the Curvaradó River Basin area, and urging the authorities to provide effective protection for them in accordance with their wishes;
- Calling on the authorities to order a full and impartial investigation into paramilitary threats against members of the communities of Curvaradó, to publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- Urging the government to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 APRIL 2014 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

Minister of Interior

Aurelio Iragorri Valencia
 Calle 12B No 8-46, Primer Piso
 Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 283 9876

Email:
 mesadeentrada@mininterior.gov.co

**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 insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

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 Colombia's long-running internal armed conflict. They have been subjected to enforced disappearance by paramilitaries – either acting alone or in collusion with the security forces – and abducted by guerrilla groups.

The Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission has been supporting efforts by Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities living in and around the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins to reclaim their lands. In these areas, paramilitaries have occupied the land of some Afro-descendant communities and have attempted to force them to grow African palm, a cash crop used in products ranging from cooking oil to soap. Powerful mining interests are also trying to develop operations in these areas.

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. Since the early 2000s a number of members of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó region who have complained about the occupation of their lands by African palm growers and other economic interests have been killed and threatened 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 (Insitituto 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 must 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.

Name: Yomaira Mendoza (f), community leaders and members of Curvaradó River Basin
Gender m/f: both

UA: 50/14 Index: AMR 23/009/2014 Issue Date: 7 March 2014