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URGENT ACTION REQUEST

11 May 2010

New Death Threats against Leaders and Organizations from south western Colombia, including NOMADESC, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Communities.

Background

On May 6, 2010 several organizations and individuals active in the region of northern Cauca, Colombia received death threats from the paramilitary group, the Black Eagles New Generation. The message stated that ***we've got you and we are not going to fail***. The organizations and individuals threatened include the leaders of the Afro-Colombian community councils of La Toma and Buenos Aires (Cauca), the Black Communities Process, the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC), Berenice Celeyta, NOMADESC, the University Workers' Union (SINTRAUNICOL) and the regional labor union federation (CUT Valle).

CoDev's Colombian partner, NOMADESC, along with the communities and organizations named in the threat, has been active in the region for years, promoting human rights and defending the land rights of the local indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. This area has become a strategic zone for several companies seeking to exploit its natural resources. There is fear among communities that the paramilitary activity is linked with the multinational activity.

This latest threat follows others received by these same persons in October 2009 and December 2009. In December, after the assassination of three community members, several of these groups organized a public audience under the auspices of the Senate Human Rights Commission to present testimony and seek government and international attention and action. Though Colombian authorities met with the leaders and agreed to take steps to address the insecurity faced by them, the threats and violence have continued. In April 2010, the Black Eagles paramilitaries massacred eight Afro-Colombian miners and left a ninth person wounded in La Toma, Cauca. The recent massacre is evidence that the risk of such threats becoming a reality is very high.

This latest paramilitary threat comes as the Canadian Parliamentary Committee on International Trade is considering Bill C-2, the implementing legislation for the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA). Though the Conservative government and many Liberal MPs believe that the CCFTA will help to strengthen the Colombian economy thereby increasing employment and decreasing violence, Canadian and Colombian civil society groups see the FTA as potentially increasing the amount of violence in the country. A full and impartial human rights impact assessment is required in order to fully understand the impact of this agreement.

NOMADESC has asked us to send as many letters as possible to show our support. Please take a moment to write a message now.

CoDevelopment Canada

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REQUESTED ACTION:

1. Write to Liberal Party Leader, Michael Ignatieff and Liberal Trade Critic, Scott Brison, and urge them to revert the Liberal party position on the CCFTA back to where it was in 2008 when they advocated an independent human rights impact assessment on the CCFTA. Ignatieff.M@parl.gc.ca and Brison.S@parl.gc.ca
2. Write to Canadian Ambassador Genevieve Des Rivieres asking her to contact the Colombian authorities and urge them to: dismantle the paramilitary groups operating in northern Cauca; guarantee the safety of the threatened individuals; investigate the threats made against these individuals; prosecute those responsible; and to follow through on the promises made to these leaders in the December 2009 meeting. bgota@international.gc.ca
3. Write to Colombian government representatives listed below asking that they:
 - Guarantee the lives and physical integrity of those people threatened and all those who live and work in the organizations and communities listed;
 - Immediately dismantle the paramilitary organizations active in this area;
 - Work to prevent any further threats or violence against the members of these communities and organizations.

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**Colombian government emails and faxes are often blocked. If your message does not go through, send a copy of it to the Colombian ambassador to Canada, Jaime Girón Duarte asking him to pass on your message. embajada@embajadacolombia.ca*