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COLOMBIA: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CHOCÓ IN DANGER

Clashes between paramilitary groups, the National Liberation Army and state security forces continue to violate the rights of the Wounaan and Embera Indigenous peoples in Chocó, western Colombia, generating an imminent humanitarian and security crisis.

On 20 August at 1:45pm, an armed confrontation between troops of the Colombian armed forces and the National Liberation Army (Ejército De Liberación Nacional, ELN) was reported 700 metres from the Wounaan territory of Puerto Olave, on the San Juan River. Security forces also recently informed the community about the presence of land mines in surrounding territories. Indigenous organizations told Amnesty International that this latest confrontation and the alleged presence of land mines has caused them to fear for their safety.

At around 10am on 22 August, another armed confrontation was reported between the ELN and the Gaitanistas Self-Defenses of Colombia (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, AGC) inside the communities of JUUN DUR (a Wounaan Indigenous reserve) and QUIPARALITO (an Embera Indigenous reserve) on the banks of the Truandó River in Riosucio, northern Chocó. Ana María Mepaquito, a 22-year-old Indigenous woman and mother of three young children, died as a result of the crossfire.

The members of these Indigenous communities report that they cannot leave their land for fear of being detained at the checkpoints on the river manned by both the paramilitary groups and the Colombian National Army, in addition to the antipersonnel mines surrounding their territories.

In addition to being confined within their territories, the people of JUUN DUUR and QUIPARALITO cannot go hunting, which is their main food source and transportation of food reaching the communities is limited, which has led to a serious humanitarian situation. The Indigenous round table of Chocó has also stated that the neighbouring communities of Peñas Blancas, Jagual, Marcial and Pichindé are at imminent risk of forced displacement due to clashes between armed groups. Finally, Amnesty International continues to receive reports about increasing forced recruitment among Indigenous girls and boys in the area.



A Wounaan community in Chocó, Colombia
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To date, the Colombian government has not taken the necessary measures to enable humanitarian aid to arrive, and there is still a lack of comprehensive State presence in the territory. More than 100 Embera people from the municipality of Riosucio, Chocó have mobilized in solidarity to Bogotá to protest in front of the presidential palace, demanding that the government take urgent measures to guarantee their life, dignity and protection.

Please send a letter, email or fax without delay.

* Call on the authorities to ensure urgent humanitarian relief to the confined communities of JUUN DUR and QUIPARALITO and provide protection to the neighbouring communities of Peñas Blancas, Jagual, Marcial and Pichindé.

* Insist on a comprehensive state presence in the Truandó and San Juan river basins to guarantee the protection, security and free mobility of Indigenous Peoples in the area.

Here is the contact information you will need:

President

Juan Manuel Santos
Presidente de la República
Palacio de Nariño,
Carrera 8 No.7-26 Bogotá,
Colombia

Email: contacto@presidencia.gov.co

Salutation: Dear Mr. President / Estimado Señor Presidente

Director of Unit for Attention and Reparation of Victims

Yolanda Pinto
Calle 16 # 6-66. Edificio Avianca Piso 19
Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: 011 57 1 426 1111

Salutation: Dear Mrs. Director / Estimada Señora Directora

Please send a copy to:

Governor of Chocó

Jhoany Carlos Alberto
Cra. 7 No. 24-76 Piso 3
Quibdó, Chocó, Colombia

Fax: 011 57 (4) 6738900 Ext 1

Email: gobernacion@choco.gov.co

Salutation: Dear Mr. Governor/
Estimado Señor Gobernador

His Excellency Nicolás Lloreda Ricaurte
Ambassador for Colombia
360 Albert Street, Suite 1002
Ottawa, Ontario K1R 7X7

Fax: 1 (613) 230-4416

E-mail: embajada@embajadacolombia.ca

Additional information

On 16 August, Amnesty International released a public statement on the situation in Chocó, expressing concern at the grave humanitarian situation in the department (see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr23/6946/2017/en/>). In the first half of 2017, Indigenous communities in Chocó complained that there have been at least two paramilitary incursions in their territories. The first took place on 6 March and caused the massive displacement of families and the confinement of nearby communities in Peña Azul (for more information, see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR23/5826/2017/en/>). The second took place on 18 April in the collective territory of Jiguamiandó, near the Pueblo Nuevo Humanitarian Zone (for more information, see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR23/6082/2017/en/>).

Crimes against international law and human rights violations persist in the department of Chocó, including the selective killing of members of Afro-Colombian communities and Indigenous peoples, forced collective displacements, the confinement of communities and forced recruitment of boys and girls.

Indigenous peoples in Chocó live facing constant threats and violence from paramilitary armed groups, so in 2009, the Constitutional Court of Colombia issued Resolution 004, urging the Colombian government to take measures, with an ethnic perspective, to design and develop a public policy on enforced displacement, aiming to protecting life, freedom and cultural diversity, among other rights.

Amnesty International has already publicly denounced the increase in the number of killings of Indigenous leaders in Colombia, highlighting the shortcomings in the implementation of the peace process. “The situation of extreme risk which Indigenous communities in Colombia are facing is alarming. These crimes highlight one of the main challenges in the implementation of the peace process: the protection of the communities living in the areas which have been most affected by the armed conflict and the need to guarantee that these deplorable acts do not go unpunished”, said Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas Director at Amnesty International (for further information, see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/04/colombia-ola-de-asesinatos-de-indigenas-resalta-fallas-de-implementacion-del-proceso-de-paz/>).