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COLOMBIA: LEADER OF PEACE COMMUNITY THREATENED

Paramilitary groups continue their incursions and threats against the people of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, Colombia, and the leaders who have reported these abuses nationally and internationally.



Photo via [Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales](#)

The paramilitary group Gaitanistas Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, AGC) is advancing to gain control of the village of San José de Apartadó and is jeopardizing the Peace Community's 20 years of work to maintain neutrality in Colombia's armed conflict. One of AGC's tactics is to threaten community leaders with death.

Gildardo Tuberquia, a member of the Internal Council of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, reported that he received at least eight death threats in 2017. The most recent occurred on 30 November, when a group of paramilitary fighters was patrolling Mulatos and Resbalosa streets in San José de Apartadó. According to the community's latest statement, the paramilitary fighters told Gildardo Tuberquia that they were going to kidnap and kill him and any other community members who continue to report these incidents. They threatened that "they will kill these sons of bitch[expletive] community members who are getting in the way of their economic plans for the region" (van a matar a esos hp miembros de la comunidad pues son un estorbo para el proyecto económico que traen para la región).

Throughout 2017, Gildardo Tuberquia has reported AGC activity and his town's need for protection, both nationally and internationally. He spoke, for example, before Colombia's Congress in May. At this time, he can only travel within San José de Apartadó with international accompaniment because of the risk due to the threats he has received. In its latest statement, the community writes, "we appreciate from the bottom of our hearts all the people and organizations that have believed our pleas for help and we ask, from our territory that we so dearly wish to see at peace, that you do not stop your letters and messages to pressure with this government that has never cared about the lives of civilians and that furthermore only looks out for its own interests."

Please send an urgent letter, email or fax without delay! Call on the authorities

- * To provide urgent measures to guarantee the right to life and physical safety for Gildardo Tuberquia, the other members of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, and the other civilians in the region who face the grave threats they have reported.
- * To take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and investigate their connections to government security forces, in compliance with their international human rights obligations.
- * To have respect for the principle of distinguishing noncombatants in the context of armed conflict, including the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó and other civilians in the region.

Here are the contact details you will require:

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

Ombudsperson

Carlos Alfonso Negret
Carrera 9 Núm.16 - 21
Bogotá D. C., Colombia
Email: Asuntosdefensor@defensoria.gov.co
Salutation: Dear Mr. Director/
Estimado Señor Director

Please send a copy to:

Peace Community

Peace Community of San José de Apartadó
AA 243 de Apartadó Antioquia,
Colombia
Email: cdpsanjose@gmail.com

His Excellency Nicolás Lloreda Ricaurte
Ambassador for Colombia
360 Albert Street, Suite 1002
Ottawa, Ontario K1R 7X7
Fax: (613) 230-4416
E-mail: embajada@embajadacolombia.ca

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó is made up of people living in a number of hamlets in the municipality of Apartadó, in Antioquia Department, north-western Colombia, who maintain their right to not be drawn into Colombia's armed conflict and refuse to take sides with any of the parties to the conflict. They refuse to bear arms or provide information or logistical support to either side. In return, the members of the Peace Community demand that the parties to the armed conflict stay out of their communities and respect their decision not to participate in or to collaborate with the warring parties.

Since the Peace Community was established on 23 March 1997, more than 200 of its members have been killed or subjected to enforced disappearance, while others have been threatened or sexually assaulted. Those in the Peace Community are in constant danger. The majority of those killed lost their lives at the hands of paramilitaries, who have often operated with the support and acquiescence of members of the armed forces in the area. Guerrilla forces have also killed members of the Peace Community. Over the last decade many civilians who are not members of the Peace Community, but have links to them or live in the area, have also been killed. In late 2016, members of the Peace Community reported an increase in paramilitary activity, with scores of paramilitaries, some in military fatigues and identifying themselves as members of the AGC, being intermittently camped in various parts of the community. Between 15 and 19 January 2017, further paramilitary incursions occurred in several hamlets in or near the Peace Community. This increase in paramilitary activity since late 2016 puts members of the Peace Community and other local inhabitants at risk.

Despite their supposed demobilization a decade ago, paramilitaries continue to operate in various parts of the country. According to the latest report on the human rights situation in Colombia, published in March 2016, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said that paramilitary groups (referred to as “post-demobilization groups” in the report) “constantly undermine human rights and citizen security, the administration of justice and peacebuilding, including land restitution. Dismantling the groups that control stolen land through the use or threat of violence represents a permanent challenge to peace.”