

COLOMBIA LAND CLAIMANT LEADER AT RISK

Enrique Cabezas, leader of the collective of Afro-descendent territory in Curvaradó (Chocó department, western Colombia), has received several threats in response to his work defending the ancestral territory and the right of the communities to not to be involved in the armed conflict.

On 2 and 3 December, Enrique Cabezas, human rights defender and leader of the collective of Afro-descendent territory in Curvaradó (Chocó department, western Colombia) received a request to meet the paramilitary group Gaitanistas Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, AGC) as they accuse him of being a member of the guerrilla group National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN). Enrique Cabezas is a known human rights defender working to protect the ancestral territory of afro-descendant communities in Curvaradó basin, and their right to not be involved in the armed conflict in the Chocó department. According to Enrique Cabezas, in previous occasions, the AGC have arranged meetings with community leaders using the same pretext only to kill them.

According to Enrique Cabezas, around 100 members of the AGC have entered the territories of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó basins, as well as the indigenous territory of Alto Guayabal. The Ministry of the Interior convened several authorities to participate in the eviction of illegitimate occupants of 4 December, complying with the Constitutional Court decisions T - 025 (2004), A-045 and A- 299 (2012). These decisions protect the rights of internally displaced people and the restitution of territories of the communities of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó after being forcibly displaced. However, in previous days to the scheduled eviction, on 23 November, some of the convened authorities and Enrique Cabezas received death threats, and therefore the eviction did not take place.

Members of the ELN are also close to the abovementioned territories. Therefore, Enrique Cabezas fears possible confrontations between the two armed groups which would negatively affect the afro-descendant and indigenous peoples.

Please send an email, tweet or letter without delay. (Postage is \$2.50.) **Urge the authorities**

- * to implement, in consultation with Enrique Cabezas and the community in Curvaradó, an effective collective protection plan for their communities as they protect their right to land restitution;
- * to ensure that the land restitution for Curvaradó communities is accomplished in an effective way and that territory is returned to its legitimate owners;

- * to guarantee the life and integrity of all people participating in the land restitution processes in the river basin of Curvaradó;
- * to take immediate steps to overcome the structural causes behind the attacks faced by human rights defenders in the region, including the persistence of paramilitary groups in the area.

Here is the contact information you need:

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Salutation: Dear President

Ministry of Interior

Nancy Patricia Gutiérrez
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Salutation: Dear Minister

Please send a copy to

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Additional information

The Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities living in the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó river basins in the process to reclaiming their territory. In these zones, paramilitaries have occupied the land of some Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities since 2005.

In recent years, many of the people who fled their land after being violently displaced by the paramilitary and security forces at the end of the 1990s have returned to the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó river basin communities. The communities have attempted to defend their territory and to stop the expansion of illegal African palm plantations and other economic activity in their territory. As a result, many members of the communities have been threatened or murdered. Despite repeated orders from the Constitutional Court, the land has not been returned to the communities.

In April 2006 the first of many different “Humanitarian Zones” was established. These are clearly marked zones whose inhabitants request that the parties to the conflict respect their decision not to participate in the conflict. They represent a means of protection, and send the message to the parties to the conflict that their rights as civilians should be respected, demanding the right of the civilian population not to be involved in the conflict.

Since 2015 there have been reports of paramilitary groups making incursions into humanitarian zones and areas of biodiversity in the municipality of Riosucio, stirring up fear among the inhabitants and threatening the leaders of the communities. The office of the Ombudsman has repeatedly issued warnings on the vulnerability of the communities in this area and the risk of further collective displacements. Despite these warnings, the state response has still not been comprehensive nor timely and the residents feel threatened by paramilitary groups.

On 26 November 2017 Mario Castaño Bravo, a land claimant leader from Curvaradó, was killed on his own farm, in the Florida area in La Larga Tumaradó territory. Unknown individuals entered his home and shot him repeatedly. Mario Castaño Bravo was overseeing the drafting of a collective reparation proposal which included acknowledgment of the communities as legitimate owners of the collective land and limiting company operations without consultation which threaten the life, land and dignity of the inhabitants.