

UA 169/19

AI Index: AMR 23/1509/2019 of 29 November 2019

COLOMBIA THOUSANDS IN NEED OF URGENT PROTECTION

Amnesty International is concerned about the forced confinement of 2,250 persons, including indigenous and afro-Colombian communities, in Bojayá, Chocó (western Colombia) who are under siege by the guerrilla National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) and the paramilitary Gaitanistas Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, AGC), groups that are denying them access to food and basic healthcare services.

On 17 November, the ombudsman's office reported that the armed groups threatened social leaders who oppose their presence in the zone. The ELN and the AGC are sustaining hostilities in the region and have even deployed landmines in the few areas with telephone coverage. This restricts the communities' access to healthcare, food, water and communication.

The governmental action on this situation has so far been focused on military response, which effectively deepens the vulnerability of these communities. Amnesty International urges Colombian authorities to deploy a comprehensive protection plan to protect the rights of Bojayá's communities.

Please send an email or letter to the president.

* In order to guarantee the protection of the communities, urge him to immediately deploy a comprehensive plan with the participation and agreement of the communities.

* Ask him to make sure that it provides effective and urgent access to all basic services and guarantees the communities' protection against any attacks from armed groups.

Write to

Iván Duque Márquez
President of Colombia
c/ Minister of Interior
Carrera 8 No. 7-26
Bogotá, Colombia

Email: contacto@presidencia.gov.co

Salutation: Mr. President

Please copy

His Excellency Federico Eduardo Hoyos Salazar
Ambassador for Colombia
360 Albert Street, Suite 1002
Ottawa, Ontario K1R 7X7
Fax: 613 230 4416
Phone: 613 230 3760
E-mail: embajada@embajadacolombia.ca

The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne
Minister of Foreign Affairs
111 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6
Postage: None required
Fax: 613 996 9607
Phone: 613 992 5234
E-mail: Francois-Philippe.Champagne@parl.gc.ca

Additional information

The Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities of Chocó State had been facing serious human rights violations during the years of conflict in Colombia. Forced displacement, mass killings, and other human rights violations occurred at the hands of guerrilla, paramilitary groups and the army.

In 2002, The Ombudsman's Office issued various alerts demonstrating the lack of protection for Afro-descendent and Indigenous communities in the municipality of Bojayá, and the inadequate state response which left communities in a vulnerable position due to the presence of the then Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). In May 2, 2002, a mass killing known as "Bojayá Massacre" marked the beginning of a violent history in Colombia with thousands of victims caught in clashes between the FARC and paramilitary groups. The inaction from the state at the time was considered critical to enabling the conditions for the human rights violations faced by people living in armed conflict zones.

In 2017, Amnesty International warned that the environment of exclusion, neglect and invisibility of this territory created by the Colombian state reinforced these communities' vulnerable state without there having been a comprehensive institutional response beyond a merely military response.

On 24 April 2019, Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action for 7,000 persons from indigenous and afro descendant communities in Bojayá, Chocó, who were facing life-threatening and forced displacement risk, as the ELN and the AGC were increasing hostilities in their territory.

On 18 October 2019, the Colombian Office of the Ombudsman raised an alert that ELN and AGC armed groups were still operating in Bojayá, placing at least 2,250 people from indigenous and afro-descendant communities under forced confinement and live-threatening risk. This was confirmed on 17 November 2019 by several ethnic-territorial organizations in Chocó and the Diocese of Quibdó, who issued an open letter to President Duque, presenting the human rights violations that the people of Chocó are experiencing, and the risks they are facing to this day. Furthermore, these organizations requested the implementation of the peace agreement, specifically the points relating to the protection of indigenous communities.