

URGENT ACTION

PARAMILITARIES THREATEN TO KILL DEFENDERS

Paramilitaries are planning to kill members of a Colombian human rights NGO, Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, and community leaders from the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basin. One attack has failed, but others are being prepared.

The NGO Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (*Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz*) learned of a plan to kill human rights defender **Faiver Chimonja** on 2-3 August, while he was travelling to Apartadocito and Llano Rico in the Curvaradó River Basin, from a witness to discussions between businessmen and paramilitaries. He changed his arrangements, and was not killed. He has been living for at least two years with the communities, who have returned to the Curvaradó River Basin, in north-western department of Chocó.

Manuel Garzón, a lawyer from the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, was followed as he left the office in Bogotá on 1 August, on his bicycle. A man followed him on a bicycle and told him, "Stay quiet with what you are doing" (*quédense quietos con lo que están haciendo*). Paramilitaries are understood to be keeping members of the NGO, who work with the communities of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basin, under surveillance. Paramilitaries have kept human rights defenders under surveillance before attempting to kill them.

A judge had ruled on 30 July that two businessmen linked to the African palm industry were responsible for the forced displacement of the communities of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basin, and sentenced them to 125 months in prison. They had been acting together with paramilitaries. Manuel Garzón had been representing the communities. A witness had told the NGO on 25 June that the businessmen were neither prepared to go to prison nor to return the land, and that there would be a massacre if they were convicted. They would kill not only the leaders of the communities of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basin, but also the members of the NGO.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety of Faiver Chimonja, Manuel Garzón and other members of the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, as well as the leaders of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basin communities, and urging the authorities to provide effective protection to those who request it, according to their wishes;
- Calling on them to order a full and impartial investigation into the attempt to kill Faiver Chimonja, the threat against Manuel Garzón and others, publish the results and bring all those responsible to justice;
- Urging them to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces in line with repeated United Nations human rights recommendations;
- Reminding them to fulfill their obligations to ensure human rights defenders can carry out their work without fear, as laid out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 SEPTEMBER 2013 TO:

President

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

Fax: 011 57 1 596 0631

**Salutation: Dear President Santos/
Excmo Sr. Presidente Santos**

Defense Minister

Juan Carlos Pinzón
Ministerio de Defensa
Carrera 54, no.26-29
Centro Administrativo Nacional (CAN)
Bogotá, Colombia

Fax: 011 57 1 266 1003

**Salutation: dear Minister/Estimado Sr.
Ministro**

And copies to:

NGO

Comisión Intereclesial Justicia y Paz
Calle 61A, No. 17-26
Bogotá
Colombia

Also send copies to:

Ambassador Carlos Urrutia
Embassy of Colombia

2118 Leroy Place, NW, Washington DC 20008

Phone: 1 202 387 8338 | Fax: 1 202 232 8643 | Email: embassyofcolombia@colombiaemb.org

Please check with the AIUSA Urgent Action Network office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission has been supporting efforts by Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities living in and around the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basins to reclaim their lands. In these areas, paramilitaries have occupied the land of some Afro-descendant communities and have attempted to force them to grow African palm, a cash crop used in products ranging from cooking oil to soap. Powerful mining interests are also trying to develop operations in these areas.

In the past few years, many of those who fled their lands following violent expulsion by paramilitaries and the security forces in the late 1990s have returned to the Afro-descendant communities of Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó. The communities have sought to defend their land rights and prevent the expansion of illegal African palm plantations and other economic activities within their territory. Many of them have been threatened and killed as a result. Despite repeated orders by the Constitutional Court the land has not been returned to the communities.

In recent years a number of people from the Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó region who have complained about the occupation of their lands by African palm growers and other economic interests have been killed by paramilitaries, who have maintained a strong presence in the region despite the large army presence. The XVII Brigade has recently built a new military base in the area. Members of this brigade's 54 Battalion have been seen mingling with a well-known paramilitary leader in the area.

In April 2006 the first of several "Humanitarian Zones" – enclosed areas whose inhabitants demand that the parties to the conflict respect their decision not to take sides in the hostilities – was set up. This is a means of protection; it also sends a message to the warring parties that their rights as civilians must be respected.

The human rights work of the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission with these communities, especially on important cases of impunity enjoyed by senior members of the security forces, has made them the target of threats and attacks.

Names: Faiver Chimonja (m), Manuel Garzón (m), other members of the NGO Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission and the leaders of the Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó River Basin communities (both)

Issues: Fear for safety, Freedom of expression, Impunity

UA: 215/13

Issue Date: 7 August 2013

Country: Colombia