

URGENT ACTION

POLICE USE TEAR GAS ON PEACEFUL PROTESTERS

Residents of the city of Buenaventura in Colombia have reported police repression, including the use of tear gas, at peaceful protests that began on 16 May. Several people, including two children, have been injured. Police and armed forces have a significant presence in the area, and fear of increasing violence remains as protests continue.

The community of Buenaventura declared a general strike on 16 May to demand the Colombian government guarantee their economic, social and cultural rights, and their right to participate in the implementation of the peace agreements with the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). The organizers of the general strike called on the residents of Buenaventura to stop all commercial and school activities and take to the streets in peaceful protest until the national government provides an adequate and prompt response to their demands. During a peaceful demonstration on Saturday 20 May, agents from the Mobile Anti-Riot Squadron (ESMAD) fired tear gas without warning at demonstrators, including children, persons with disabilities and elderly persons, who were gathered on Piñal bridge and in the sector of La Delfina, two of the eight meeting points of the demonstration. Local NGO Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN) reported to Amnesty International that this unwarranted repression incited a confrontation between the security forces and demonstrators and resulted in several people being injured, including two children. PCN made an urgent call to strengthen the presence of human rights authorities in order to prevent confrontations and repression.

In spite of fears of further repression and violence, on Sunday 21 May and Monday 22 May peaceful demonstrations were held again in different parts of Buenaventura and surrounding rural areas. The Indigenous Guard, an unarmed protection corps from various Indigenous communities around the country, also participated in the demonstrations to protect demonstrators from further violence. Protesters announced that the general strike will be maintained until the government addresses the issues at stake. In other cities in Colombia - such as Quibdó (Chocó department), Tumaco (Nariño) and Cali (Valle del Cauca) - demonstrations in support of the general strike have also been announced. Local groups in Buenaventura are concerned that as the demonstrations grow, so does the risk of violent repression on the part of State security forces.

1) TAKE ACTION

Write a letter, send an email, call, fax or tweet:

- Calling the Colombian government to guarantee people's right to participate in peaceful demonstrations, in particular the general strike in Buenaventura and other cities;
- Demanding the Colombian police and other State security forces not to engage in undue force and to respect the human rights of all demonstrators in Buenaventura and other cities;
- Urging national and local authorities to take immediate measures to guarantee the fundamental rights to water, health and quality education of the residents of Buenaventura, and the right to participate in the implementation of the peace agreement signed with FARC.

Contact these two officials by 5 July, 2017:

President

Juan Manuel Santos
President of Colombia
Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26 Bogotá, Colombia
Email: contacto@presidencia.gov.co
Salutation: Dear President

Ambassador Juan Carlos Pinzón

Embassy of Colombia
1724 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC 20036
T: 202.387.8338
Email: embassyofcolombia@colombiaemb.org
Salutation: Dear Ambassador

2) LET US KNOW YOU TOOK ACTION

[Click here](#) to let us know if you took action on this case! *This is Urgent Action 117.17*

Here's why it is so important to report your actions: we record the actions taken on each case—letters, emails, calls and tweets—and use that information in our advocacy.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Two major issues have generated the civil unrest in Buenaventura, which is mostly populated by Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities: the city has long been systematically abandoned by the state (resulting in 80% of the population living in poverty, and a generalized lack of access to fundamental human rights), and a high level of violence due to the presence of several rival actors (drug traffickers, criminal gangs, and other armed groups including guerrillas).

The community of Buenaventura also called for a general strike three years ago, following a declaration of a state of emergency by the government. A negotiation was set up between the community and the government, and an agreement was reached that the government would take immediate action to provide water and sanitation to the whole of the population of Buenaventura, to build a modern hospital, and to improve the education system, among other measures. Up until now most of these promises are yet to be met.

Name: Buenaventura residents
Gender: All

UA: 117/17 AI Index: AMR 23/6325/2017 Issue Date: 24 May 2017