

URGENT ACTION

TWO AFRO-DESCENDANT DEFENDERS CRIMINALIZED

Sara Quiñonez and her mother Tulia Maria Valencia, community leaders and human rights defenders from Alto Mira and Frontera in the municipality of Tumaco, have been unjustly detained and accused of charges they did not commit.

On 23 April, Colombian authorities detained **Sara Quiñonez** and her mother **Tulia Valencia** in the city of Cali, southwest Colombia. Both leaders have been formally accused of “rebellion” and “aggravated conspiracy to commit a crime”. They are currently detained at the state prison near Cali in Jamundi, Valle, until the appeal hearing in the coming weeks. The organization Black Communities Process (Proceso de Comunidades Negras, PCN) told Amnesty International that the charges against Sara Quiñonez and Tulia Valencia are unfounded, as they are not members of a guerrilla group nor have they been involved in the illegal practices they are accused of. PCN also reported that the trial against the women has been unjust and discriminatory because of their identity as Afro-descendant and their role as human rights defenders.

Sara Quiñonez is on the government board of the Afro-descendant community of Alto Mira and Frontera. She is a human rights defender who fights for the land rights of her community, which faces constant harassment from numerous armed actors that have tried to exercise control over their territory, especially those related to coca crops. Tulia Valencia is also a recognized local leader, dedicating her career to promoting and protecting the individual and collective rights of her community. Both live in Cali after being displaced from their communities following the killings of two other community leaders. PCN is concerned for the lives and integrity of other Afro-descendant women human rights defenders in the Pacific region of Colombia, as these women are predominantly the vocal community leaders and the ones being targeted for their work.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights granted precautionary measures to the leaders of the Governing Board of the Alto Mira and Frontera Community Council, including Sara Quiñonez, in March 2018. The request followed reports of violence in the department of Nariño, especially in the municipality of San Andrés de Tumaco, and the murder of Community Council leader José Jair Cortés on 17 October 2017. Sara Quiñonez has also received protection measures from the National Protection Unit in recognition of her risk as a social leader.

1) TAKE ACTION

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

- Urging the Attorney General to immediately release Sara Quiñonez and Tulia María Valencia and refrain from pressing charges without strong evidence, with the purpose of preventing them from having a trial in freedom;
- Calling on the Attorney General to adjust its internal guidelines to ensure that the criminal justice system is not used to attack and harass human rights defenders and that criminal investigations are only initiated when there is merit and evidence for it;
- Urging the authorities to adequately implement the precautionary measures that have already been granted to Sara Quiñonez and the Community Council and to provide comprehensive protection measures to Afro-descendant women human rights defenders in the Pacific coast of Colombia in accordance with their wishes, guaranteeing their human rights work without fear for their safety.

Contact these two officials by 18 June, 2018:

President

Señor Juan Manuel Santos
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26 Bogotá, Colombia
 Correo: contacto@presidencia.gov.co

Salutation: Dear President Santos/ Estimado Presidente Santos

Ambassador Camilo Reyes, Embassy of Colombia
 1724 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC 20036
 Phone: 202 387 8338 | Fax: 202-232-8643
 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 85.18*

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Afro-Colombian Community Council of Alto Mira and Frontera has been subjected to violence and dispossession at the hands of paramilitary groups, guerrilla groups, drug traffickers, soldiers, and multinational corporation for decades. Sara Quiñonez served as the President and later as the Vice-President of the Community Council, and Tulia Valencia is also a well-known leader of the women's group and serves on local committees in the Community Council.

On 6 October 2017, Amnesty International reported that nine peasant farmers (*campesinos*) were killed and more than a dozen injured in the municipality of Tumaco in southwestern Colombia, allegedly by members of the Colombian Army and National Police. Members of Colombia's security forces opened fire indiscriminately on rural communities protesting peacefully in the areas of Alto Mira and Frontera. The communities were protesting against the slow implementation of the programme for the voluntary replacement of illicit crops, set out in the Peace Agreement signed in November 2016. This is a clear signal to the authorities of the need to protect the civilian population during the implementation of the Peace Agreement.

Since 28 September 2017, the farming communities of Alto Mira and Frontera have been peacefully protesting against the government's current strategy to reduce the areas planted with illicit crops. According to the protesters, the authorities are failing to comply with the terms of the Peace Agreement, which states that such actions must be voluntary and carried out with their consent.

Tumaco is one of the areas with the greatest coca leaf production in the country; Alto Mira is the territory with the most hectares planted with coca. As a result, it is a priority area for the implementation of the illicit crop replacement programme. However, as in other areas of this region, progress in implementing the Peace Agreement has been slow and rural communities are concerned about the lack of government action to guarantee their fundamental rights or provide alternatives forms of development.

Name: Sara Quiñonez and Tulia Maria Valencia
Gender m/f: female

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