

Dear Mr Howells,

I write to inform you of my grave concern for the safety of members of the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP) due to the eight death threats they have received since 24 August 2008, and the temporary kidnapping of one of its members, Yimmi Armando Jansasoy Muñoz, in Chigorodó on 3 September. CIJP undertakes human rights accompaniment of displaced Afro-Colombian and mestizo communities in the river Curbaradó basin who are attempting to undertake a return to and recuperation of their lands.

According to reports by CIJP they have received: death threats in which they have been threatened and ordered to leave their human rights work in the humanitarian zones of Cubaradó; the kidnapping of a member of their organisation Yimmi Armando Jansasoy Muñoz, who was held for over an hour in a truck at gun point by men dressed in civilian clothes; a number of the calls which were made by persons who identified themselves as the 'Black Eagles' from telephone numbers that were reported to the Colombian authorities. Given these events I am seriously concerned for the safety of CIJP human rights defenders and the communities that they accompany. I also fear that should the death threats and the kidnapping force CIJP to leave the area of Curbaradó, the Afro-Colombian and mestizo communities will be left in a vulnerable position and the legal process of returning the lands to the Curbaradó will be put in jeopardy. This process is essential if the rule of law is to be seen to operate in this zone.

The continued existence of illegal armed structures in the Curbarado region of Colombia is of particular concern, as these structures appear to be exercising social, political and economic control in the area. Immediate and transparent investigation into their activities is essential if they are not to present a permanent and serious risk to the safety of human rights defenders and the exercise of the rule of law in Colombia.

I therefore respectfully request that you consider the following actions:

- a full and impartial investigation into the threats against CIJP in order to identify and punish those responsible for the threats against CIJP's members and the kidnapping of Yimmi Armando Jansasoy Muñoz and that these results are published
- to take measures to guarantee the safety of CIJP's members and their families, in fulfilment of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' precautionary measures; and
- a public expression of support for the lawful and legitimate work of CIJP to enable CIJP to continue its work in defending human rights in the Curbaradó river basin and the rest of Colombia.

I will follow with interest the situation of the Inter-Church Commission of Justice and Peace. I should be grateful if you would keep me informed of progress in the investigations in this case.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Lucas