

URGENT ACTION

DEATH THREATS TO AFRO-DESCENDANT LEADERS

Several Afro-descendant leaders from Cauca Department have been threatened as they continue their campaign in favour of their territorial rights and against illegal mining.

On 28 April **Francia Márquez**, a leader of the Afro-descendant community of La Toma in Suárez Municipality, Cauca Department, received a death threat by text to her mobile phone, which also named two other leaders from La Toma. The text read: "RIGHT the time for settling accounts has arrived with those that call themselves defenders of territories, those sons-of-bitches **Eduar Mina**, **Francia Márquez**, **Jhon Jairo Valverde**. We know how you move about the order is to kill you so that you do not oppose development. You have been warned and now be ready. Signed BACRIN [sic]". The Colombian government refers to paramilitary groups, which continue to operate often in collusion with the security forces, as criminal gangs, the acronym for which in Spanish is BACRIM.

Francia Márquez and other La Toma community leaders have faced repeated threats following their efforts to demand protection for the community's ancestral land rights and to prevent the exploitation of their territories by outside mining interests, including multinational gold mining companies.

On 27 April community members reported seeing two unidentified men, at least one of whom had masked his face with a scarf, travelling on a motorbike without plates and stopping in the town of Suárez, Suárez Municipality, and in the Yolombó area of La Toma. The two men reportedly demanded to know the whereabouts of **Alexa Leonor Mina** and **Mery Yein Mina**. Both women are human rights defenders and are the sister and cousin, respectively, of Francia Márquez. On 25 April both women had participated in a demonstration in Santander del Quilichao, Cauca Department, in support of the "Protection of Life and Ancestral Territory" (Cuidado de la Vida y el Territorio Ancestral). There have been allegations that the ESMAD anti-riot police used excessive force against some of those participating in the protest.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Expressing concern for those named above and for other community leaders of La Toma, and calling on the authorities to take all measures deemed appropriate to guarantee their safety;
- Calling on them to undertake full and impartial investigations into the threat against Francia Márquez, Eduar Mina, Jhon Jairo Valverde, Alexa Leonor Mina and Mery Yein Mina, to make the results public and bring all those responsible to justice;
- Urging them to take decisive action to dismantle paramilitary groups operating in the area and break any links with the security forces in line with repeated United Nations human rights recommendations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 10 JUNE 2016 TO:

President

Juan Manuel Santos
 Presidente de la República
 Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26
 Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 596 0631
**Salutation: Dear President Santos/
 Excmo. Sr. Presidente Santos**

Minister of Interior

Juan Fernando Cristo
 Calle 12B No 8-46, Primer Piso
 Bogotá, Colombia
 Fax: +57 1 283 9876
**Salutation: Dear Minister / Estimado
 Sr. Ministro**

And copies to:

Local NGO

Asociación de Consejos Comunitarios
 del Norte del Cauca, ACONC
 Carrera 10 #2 – 71, piso 2
 Municipio Santander de Quilichao
 Departamento del Cauca, Colombia

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. His Excellency My Nestor Osorio, Embassy of Colombia, 3 Hans Crescent, London SW1X 0LN, Tel 0207 5899777, elondres@cancilleria.gov.uk

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

During the long-running armed conflict in Colombia, human rights defenders, as well as Indigenous, Afro-descendant and peasant farmer communities, have endured the brunt of the conflict. All the warring parties – the security forces, either alone or in collusion with paramilitary groups, and guerrilla forces – are responsible for human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, including killings, enforced disappearances or abductions, torture, forced displacement and crimes of sexual violence.

Over recent years, La Toma community leaders have faced repeated death threats in the context of their campaigning for recognition of the community's territorial rights and against the presence of national and international gold-mining companies. Small-scale illegal mining operations are present in La Toma and community leaders have faced paramilitary death threats after demanding that the authorities take action to remove and stop these operations. On 11 December 2014 the government reached an agreement with the community to take action but to date little has been done to end illegal mining operations in La Toma. For more information, see Amnesty International's 2015 report *Restoring the land, securing the peace: Indigenous and Afro-descendant territorial rights* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr23/2615/2015/en/>).

Name: Francia Márquez (f), Eduar Mina (m), Jhon Jairo Valverde (m), Alexa Leonor Mina (f) and Mery Yein Mina (f)
Gender m/f: both

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