



Statement from the Afro-Colombian Women Human Rights Defenders Project

November 17, 2014

“What else we need to do?” Afro-Colombian Women walk in defense of life and the ancestral Black territories

“The love for life is stronger than the fear of death” (chant from women of Norte del Cauca when they decided to mobilize)

After many demands from Afro-Colombian communities and empty commitments by the Colombian authorities to halt the presence of illegal mining in their ancestral territories and to respect their rights, the women of Norte del Cauca in the black territories of Colombia have taken matters in their own hands. First taking direct action by mobilizing the community to expel two of the illegal excavators along with the miners that encroached on their territory and deciding to take the case of Norte del Cauca and illegal mining straight to the halls of government in Bogotá.

Today, Afro-descendant women from the Northern Cauca region is embarking on a ten-days journey walking from Norte del Cauca to Bogotá, to pressure the Colombian authorities to end the catastrophic presence of heavy mining in their ancestral territories.

In May, the gravity of the problem of illegal mining was dramatically highlighted with the collapse of an illegal mine in the town of San Antonio, in the municipality of Santander that buried more than 50 people. And while this tragic situation led to the closer of the mine in San Antonio, the illegal operation along with the excavators simply moved on to other areas, including the territories of the Community Council of La Toma. In response, the community rose up, led by women and physically expelled a number of the machines but others remain, visible and working with the acquaintance of the local authorities.

Afro-Colombian Women Human Rights Defenders project commend the courage and decision of the women from Northern Cauca region to do all that is necessary to protect their lives, rights and territories by demanding that governmental authorizes enforce the laws of the nations and respect and protect the lives and communities Afro-Colombians.

The women are demanding that all machinery is taken out of the territory along with the individuals representing these foreign interests. Moreover, they are demanding that a full independent investigation into the environmental and economic damages that have occurred as result of the illegal mining and the person’s and interests responsible for the death threats and attempted intimidations of local community members and leaders. And they demand that the tragedy that occurred in San Antonio and El Palmar, in the municipality of Santander de Quilichao be fully investigated and those responsible face the full weight of the law.

“Many of us have raised our children on our own. The pans for mining gold, the hoes, and the shovels are witness to this. The territory has been our partner, and it has been with us during

happy and sad moments. Our grandmothers, such as Doña Paulina Balanta, taught us that *'the territory is life, and life does not have a price'* and that *'the territory is dignity and it does not have a price.'*" Say the Afro-descendant women on their [statement](#) calling the mobilization. "Today, our lives are in danger, and the possibilities to live as Afro-descendant people are minimal. (...) We have protected our lives in many ways over the years. We ask ourselves: What else can we do? Therefore, we met and decided to walk to Bogota, and we will tell everyone about our situation as we walk". So they will be **marching for life and the ancestral territories**, and they need our support and solidarity.

You can support the Afro-Colombian women from Norte del Cauca, contribute to their walk by donating at <http://www.gofundme.com/hbh9xc>

Contact information: charominarojas@gmail.com - (57) 314-370-8931

Mining exploitation in Black ancestral territories without prior consultation and consent is illegal mining. Say NO! to #Mineriallegal

#EscucheNuestrosPasos - #MujeresNegrasCaminan