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Focos de Interés

Focos de Interés is a monthly newsletter that highlights different aspects of the human rights situation in Colombia, from the perspective of PBI's work and objectives. This publication is for limited distribution only and may not be reproduced without prior permission.

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Dear Sir/Madam:

Through this monthly newsletter the Colombia Project of Peace Brigades International (PBI) would like to share its concerns, based primarily on eyewitness accounts gathered during our daily accompaniment of persons, organizations and displaced communities whose physical safety is threatened because of their work in defense of human rights.

New threats against the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP) in the Curbaradó river basin

Peace Brigades International (PBI) is concerned about the serious threats in Curbaradó that have put the security and lives of the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP) at risk in the Curbaradó river basin. PBI has confirmed that the hostile environment faced by the CIJP field team has deteriorated since the end of July during the phase of definition of land boundaries, the first step prior to the land being handed back.¹

Members of the CIJP field team in the Caño Claro humanitarian zone, a municipality of Carmen del Darién received a threatening phone call on August 24th. A woman who called herself a member of the 'Black Eagles' an illegal armed group, said: "This is the Black Eagles, you should leave the area, you are being watched, you should leave now".² Around half an hour later, the same day, the CIJP office in Bogotá received another call from the same number, in which people who called themselves 'Black Eagles' demanded that the CIJP field members leave the area immediately.³

PBI reacted to these incidents by requesting the protection of the humanitarian zone by the Julio Londoño Battalion, of the XV Brigade which has jurisdiction in the area. In spite of this, the following day the team in the humanitarian zone received a third threat from a man who said: "with or without military protection, we are going to kill you".⁴ A few days later, on August 30th, another worrying incident occurred; two unidentified men entered the Camelias humanitarian zone at one in the morning, with no respect for the signs limiting the boundaries of the zone, and made for the house where the CIJP team and two PBI international observers were staying. When members of the community saw them, they fled.⁵ Two members of the PBI team were present in both Caño Claro and Camelias at the time of these incidents.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, in their latest press release emphasise that "these latest events have occurred as a continuation of a wave of recurring death threats and harassment during the month

¹ Focos de interés June 2008

² Report 93 Urgent Action Curbaradó, "Amenazado equipo de Justicia y Paz en Curbaradó", Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, August 24th 2008.

³ Ibid

⁴ Report - Urgent Action - Curbaradó, "Nueva amenaza de muerte a integrantes de Justicia y Paz", Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, August 25th 2008

⁵ Report on Curbaradó, "Por amenazas e intimidación salen de Curbaradó 2 DD.HH. de JyP", Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission, August 30th 2008.

of June 2008 against different human rights organisations that are active in the Curbaradó region”.⁶ Furthermore, the Observatory “is afraid that these death threats aim to force CIJP to leave the Bajo Atrato region”.⁷

As the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) highlights in its 2007 report,⁸ the harassment and threats against different civil society sectors made by the self-named ‘Black Eagles’ seem to indicate that the demobilisation process, begun in 2003, has not achieved the effective dismantling of illegal armed structures that operate in the region. Likewise, in its latest report, the Permanent Council on the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP-OEA) expressed its concern for the “*presence of bastions of non-demobilised groups and re-armed structures in areas like Urabá*” showing that “*these factions continue and are even growing, in spite of the efforts of the Army and the Police*”.⁹

PBI requests that the international community requires the Colombian State to carry out a full investigation to clarify the facts and to sanction those responsible for these threats. Equally, PBI calls the international community to intercede in order that the Colombian State protects the lives and guarantees secure conditions to allow the members of the CIJP to continue with their human rights defence work in the Curbaradó river basin.

Threats against and harassment of members of the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes

Peace Brigades International (PBI) expresses its concern about the threats and the continuous harassment of victims, victims’ organisations and human rights defenders. Various members of the Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE), including the United National Farmers Trade Union have been harassed and followed.¹⁰

On August 21st, a member of the National Secretary General’s Office of this organization was followed and photographed by persons unknown on leaving the MOVICE head offices in Bogotá. On July 23rd, three people that were leaving a meeting in the MOVICE head offices were following by an unknown person. These harassments were preceded by the suspicious presence of people and cars opposite the MOVICE head offices.¹¹

These events show that persistence of the hostile environment in which human rights defenders work, following the threats received by various national and international social and human rights organisations in March of this year.

PBI is concerned that this harassment against members of the organisations that make up MOVICE will weaken their human rights work. PBI calls upon the international community to intercede to guarantee secure conditions for all those who work actively in MOVICE and to request that the State provide guarantees and respect for the working space of human rights defenders to enable them to carry out their work related to truth, justice and reparation for victims.

PBI appreciates your continued support for our work in Colombia to protect human rights defenders and displaced communities.

PBI Colombia

⁶ Urgent call COL 013/0808/OBS 143, “Amenazas de muerte/Hostigamiento”, Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, August 26th 2008.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ 2007 Annual report, UNHCHR, pages 22-23.

⁹ 11th report, MAPP-OEA, June 2008

¹⁰ “Continúan las amenazas contra miembros de FENSUAGRO-CUT”, Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado, 14 de agosto 2008.

¹¹ “Hostigamientos en la sede nacional del movice”, Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado, 22 de agosto 2008.