



An Incursion of the Colombian National Army Worries our Communities in the Naya Region

On Tuesday November 8 (2005), a National Army contingent began to enter the Naya river region in Colombia's pacific coast between the departments of Cauca and Valle. According to peasant and Indian members of our organization UTINAYA (The Naya Inter-ethnic Territorial Union) there are 100 men in the army's delegation. Utinaya members were surprised by the fact that some of the men had their faces covered and that the national army has not made a public announcement as to the reason that brings them to the Naya region, where they have not been present in five years.

Why are we worried.

In April of 2001 paramilitaries from the Calima bloc massacred 100 people in the Naya community (although the government claims that less than 50 people lost their lives) and caused the displacement of about one thousand Naya residents to the town of Santander de Quilichao in Cauca.

Prior to the 2001 massacre, some members of the public force came to our communities to look for information about people and the situation of public order in our region. We are worried because some of the uniformed men entering the Naya in this last incursion have covered their faces and have many weapons.

We also worry because this military incursion coincides with recent events taking place in other towns in the Cauca department. Indian communities in other parts of our department have recently decided to invade lands in order to pressure the government to comply with the agreements that resulted from an Inter-American Court sentence against the Colombian state for its participation in the 1991 Caloto massacre. After the sentence, the Colombian state agreed to compensate Cauca Indians with land, but has not complied. In recent days, the government has criminalized protests in the Cauca

department, writing off this department as a area with problems of public order and terrorism.

In the case of our region, next year (in 2006) marks the end of the five year deadline given to the government to impart justice for the damages caused to our community as a result of the 2001 massacre. If the state does not impart justice within said five year limit, the Inter-American Court can intervene. We believe that the Court will find ample evidence of the participation of members of the armed forces in the 2001 massacre of some of our people.

Some background information

Twenty five thousand people live in the Naya region. We are Nasa and Eperara Siapidaara Indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombians and peasants. Our communities live in poverty and exclusion, and have been abandoned by the Colombian state. Except for the Eperara people, we have not been given title to our lands. This worries us because our region is bio-diverse and is beginning to attract all sorts of interested parties who want to dispute our right to hold our traditional land.

For this reason, our organization UTINAYA, with the help of some INCODER (The Colombian Institute for Rural Development) functionaries has begun a study to set the limits of our ancestral territory in order to claim titles to this land on behalf of our communities. The Naya and Incoder team were preparing training workshops (November 8-11, 2005) for training the local people who would help draw the maps of our lands. We are very worried that the military might interfere with this process. We are also worried that the military presence might destroy our organizational efforts—which brought together Utinaya—to control and manage our territory.

These organizational efforts have been strenuous because the Pacific highlands have become strategic areas for armed groups and drug traffickers. It is not a secret that coca is now being grown in our lands. Thus, our land has become a disputed region for armed groups. This has brought violence to our land.

We are also worried that the region's militarization might stop the flood of food and medicine into our community. We are also worried that some people might be arbitrarily detained. We don't believe that just because our community has been abandoned by the state, and has become an area of coca cultivations, it justifies dismissing as a "hideout for delinquents where the guerrilla takes its kidnapping victims" as one notable Cauca leader once claimed. The Indian, peasant and Afro-Colombian people who live in this

region deserve a better treatment. We have organized to claim our human rights and to place our land in the map of Colombia and in the eyes of the international community. We are worried for the lives and safety of our defenseless people.

We ask President Álvaro Uribe Vélez to withdraw the military from the Naya region, to protect the lives of our people and hasten the legal procedures necessary to give titles to our land.

Unión Territorial Interétnica del Naya, UTINAYA

Popayán, noviembre 10 de 2005

Please write on our behalf to

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