Re: Submission of allegations of violations against human rights defenders in Colombia

Dear Mr Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

First of all we would like to sincerely thank you for your good work advocating for the protection of human rights defenders around the world. Last week on 14 January 2015, we received a complaint from Church leaders in Colombia who have received threats from paramilitary groups for their human rights advocacy work in their respective regions. The names of these church leaders and the churches they represent are as follow:

1. Augustin Jimenez: Mennonite Church Teusquillo,
2. Father Fernando Sanchez, the Anglican Church in the Caribbean Coast
3. Jairo Barriga, Presbyterian Church
4. Germana Zarate, Presbyterian Church
5. Milton Mejia, Presbyterian Church

These individuals have been advocating for land rights of local communities in Colombia and provide advice to victims of human rights violations. They have also been disseminating information of human rights violation to both local and international human rights organizations and networks. Moreover, they have also been supporting the peace process and dialogues with FARC in Colombia.

Because of their human rights advocacy work, these individuals received serious threats on 11 January 2015 from “Aguilas Negras” (Black Eagles) who declared military action on all human rights defenders that expose their human rights violations. The threats, which were posted online and reported by “Journal El Heraldo”, named the above mentioned individuals by names and warned them that they are being identified so either they have to leave the country or live in hiding. The threats stated “they have being identified; we will blow up and finish with you”. More details on the threats are available online at, http://www.elheraldo.co/judicial/nuevas-amenazas-lideres-y-defensores-de-victimas-180448 or you can read the attached letter.

The group has therefore appealed to the international organizations/community to raise their voice and show solidarity with them. With this letter we hope you could follow up with your respective sources from the region and liaise with concerned authorities to ensure protection for these human rights defenders.
This letter is submitted by the Lutheran World Federation, which is a global communion of 144 churches in the Lutheran tradition, representing over 72 million Christians in 79 countries with its headquarters in Geneva. This information is based on the communications received from Milton Mejia (miltonmej@gmail.com) on 14 January 2015. If you have any questions or need further clarifications, please contact the following individuals from the Lutheran World Federation Geneva Office.

Dr. Ojot Miru Ojulu,
Advocacy Officer
Office for International Affairs and Human Rights
Lutheran world Federation

Rev. Dr. Patricia Cuyatti

Area Secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean
Department for Mission and Development
Lutheran World Federation