

URGENT ALERT:

ON THE MASSIVE FORCED DISPLACEMENT OF THE WIWA PEOPLE OF THE SIERRA NEVADA OF SANTA MARTA

Riohacha, La Guajira, 26 February 2024. The signatory organizations, below, accompanying the Wiwa indigenous people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, beneficiaries of precautionary measures granted on 4 February 2005 by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), issue this urgent alert to inform the national and local authorities about the forced and massive displacement of more than 300 indigenous people to the municipality of Riohacha (La Guajira) and other communities to the interior of the Sierra Nevada, including women and children, who have had to leave their territory as a result of clashes between armed groups.

Below we present the facts and background of this serious humanitarian situation, and at the same time we call upon the competent authorities to give their immediate attention and provide resolution to this issue.

FACTS

1. On 21 June 2023, the Ombudsman's Office of Colombia (*Defensoría del Pueblo*) issued a warning (*Alerta Temprana de Inminencia 025 de 2023*) for Riohacha and Dibulla, regarding the risk to communities there, due to the presence, activity and confrontations of the armed groups *Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia* (AGC) and *Autodefensas Conquistadoras de la Sierra Nevada* (ACSN).
2. Since October 2023, communities in the Ranchería river basin identified the presence of several armed groups in the region, including the presence of armed groups in the community of Marokazo. In December 2023, inhabitants of the communities of Marokazo and Siminke again identified the presence of armed actors self-identified as the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN). These armed actors approached the houses of some inhabitants, asking for some Wiwa leaders, and commented that they knew about the presence of the AGC and the robberies and disorder that was occurring.
3. Later in December, in the communities of Bernaka, Atshintujkuay Ahuyamal, *sagas* (women who are traditional authorities of the Wiwa people) asked individuals from the *Organización Wiwa Yugumaiun Bunkuanarrua Tayrona* (OWYBT) not to go beyond the aforementioned communities, because of the presence of armed actors. That same month, individuals from the communities of Sabana Grande and Potrerito identified the presence of armed actors, of an unknown identity.
4. On 12 January 2024 the presence of 10 to 15 armed men, allegedly linked to paramilitary groups, was reported in the communities of Siminke, Sabana y Medio and Limón de Carrizal. These men reportedly intimidated inhabitants of the communities, stating that those who left the communities would become military targets. Additionally, the presence of paramilitary actors was identified in the communities of Barcino, Tezuka and Guamaca.
5. On 3 February 2024, individuals from the community of Limón Carrizal saw a group of armed actors passing by, asking for some of the community's teachers and stating that they were going to the communities of Marokazo and Siminke.
6. On 6 February 2024, individuals from the community of Marokazo saw a group of 15 heavily armed people passing by, around 5 a.m., heading to the community of Siminke. Around 8:00 a.m. that same day, 15 men who identified themselves as *Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia* arrived and settled in the community of Siminke, staying there all day, which generated anxiety and fear in the

community. In particular, communities expressed fear of being criminalized by the paramilitary groups.

7. In the morning of 24 February 2024, a pamphlet signed by the guerrilla group ELN was circulated in the communities of Marokazo, Siminke and Sabana Joaquina. Hours later, a new communication from this same guerrilla group appeared, which denied the information in the pamphlet circulated earlier. That same day, at approximately 11:00 p.m., an armed confrontation began in the community of Limón del Carrizal, between the armed groups known as Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC) and the Autodefensas Conquistadoras de la Sierra Nevada (ACSN). The confrontation lasted until 11 a.m. of 25 February 2024.

9. On 25 February, after the armed confrontation between the AGC and ACSN, the forced displacement of the community of Limón de Carrizal to the city of Riohacha began. This community is made up of 76 families, nearly 300 people, including 142 children, 150 adults and 8 pregnant women.

10. That same Sunday, at 5:00 p.m., a drone was observed overflying in the vicinity of Siminke and Sabanas de Joaquina. A similar situation had occurred days before, on 23 February, in the community of Molino - Resguardo Campo Alegre, while a Human Rights Workshop led by the Human Rights Commission of the OWYBT, Colectivo de Abogados y Abogadas “José Alvear Restrepo” (CAJAR) and International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) was taking place.

11. Currently, there is a situation of internal displacement. As a result of the confrontations, 30 people from the farms surrounding the community of Limón del Carrizal had to flee to the community of Caracolí. These displaced persons have not received any type of humanitarian aid, as is the case of other internally displaced families. As of this February, as a result of the presence of paramilitary groups in the territory, about 44 families from the community of Mucura had been forcibly displaced to the Guamaca and Mamorango region.

12. The communities of Marokazo, Sabana Joaquina, Siminke and La Laguna are also in a situation of confinement as a result of armed confrontations between paramilitary groups. The inhabitants of the community of La Laguna and other communities of the Wiwa people are at risk of displacement due to the siege and presence of these armed groups in the territory.

13. The humanitarian situation of the displaced Wiwa people is very delicate and demands urgent actions of protection by the State, particularly as the Wiwa people are subjects of special constitutional protection and find themselves in a situation of complete defenselessness and vulnerability.

BACKGROUND

On 4 February 2005, the IACHR granted precautionary measures in favor of the Wiwa indigenous people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. The Wiwa people had allegedly been subjected to a series of acts of paramilitary violence, including the murder of approximately 50 indigenous leaders and the forced displacement of more than 300 people. The Commission requested the State of Colombia to: (i) adopt the necessary measures to protect the life and personal integrity of the members of the Wiwa People of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, respecting their cultural identity and protecting the special relationship they have with their territory, in accordance with the obligations undertaken by the State; (ii) provide humanitarian aid to the victims of displacement and the food crisis, particularly the children of the indigenous people; (iii) together with the beneficiaries, through their representative organizations – the Wiwa Yugumaiun Bukuanarúa Tayrona (OBYBT) and the Gonabindua Tayrona Organization – and the petitioners, agree upon collective protection measures, including the presence

of a community defender; and v) adopt the necessary measures to put an end to the acts of violence and threats against the beneficiary community.

REQUESTS

Due to the imminent risk in which the Wiwa People of the Sierra Nevada find themselves, we urgently request the national and local authorities to:

1. Adopt the necessary measures to protect the life and personal integrity of the members of the Wiwa People of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, respecting their cultural identity and protecting the special relationship they have with their territory.
2. Provide humanitarian aid to victims of forced displacement and the food crisis, in particular to children of the indigenous people. Likewise, generate the material conditions for their voluntary, secure, and guaranteed return to their territory.
3. Convene an Inter-institutional Roundtable session to follow up on the precautionary measures, with the participation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior, and other relevant authorities, to address the humanitarian and security situation of the Wiwa people.
4. To the relevant authorities, to carry out a physical exploration in the territory to eliminate unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices that may have been left in the territory as a result of the confrontations.
5. To the Attorney General's Office, to initiate an investigation into the forced displacement and other crimes committed as a result of the confrontations and presence of armed groups in the territory.
6. To OHCHR, to follow up on the situation and facilitate humanitarian and human rights observation.

To the international community:

1. To provide humanitarian accompaniment through the International Red Cross.
2. Call for a mission to verify the facts of what occurred in the communities where the fighting took place.
3. In the framework of the precautionary measures granted on 4 February 2005, we request that the IACHR carry out an extraordinary visit to the territory to verify the situation of persons in conditions of displacement and confinement.
4. To the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples, we request that within the framework of his upcoming Mission to Colombia, he take this situation into account and recommend that the Colombian State adopt immediate, concerted and comprehensive actions to guarantee the survival, life and integrity of the Wiwa People and the peoples of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

SIGNATORY ORGANIZATIONS

Organización Wiwa Yugumaiun Bunkuanarrua Tayrona (OWYBT)

Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP/PPP)

Colectivo de Abogados y Abogadas "José Alvear Restrepo" (CAJAR)

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente (AIDA)