

March 11, 2009

Barack Hussein Obama
President of the United States
White House
Washington, DC
United States of America

RE: A petition from Afro-Colombian Community Councils and grassroots organizations

Dear Honorable President Barack Obama:

The Afro-Colombian organizations in Colombia would like to congratulate you and wish you great success as President of the United States. As part of the global African Diaspora we are proud of your triumph and share it with you as a collective triumph for all those that struggle to institute democratic values, respect for the sovereignty of the people, and for the defense of human rights.

We would like to take this opportunity to briefly share with you the current state of Afro-Colombians and point out a few aspects of United State's policies towards Colombia. The U.S.-Colombian relationship is crucial to our Afro-Colombian communities and therefore we urge you to establish a direct channel of communication with our organizations. We believe that your government will be able to develop joint cooperative mechanisms for a policy that is more inclusive with Colombia. Likewise, we are confident that your government will be able to play a prominent role in the fight against racism and discrimination. Now that we are approaching the evaluation of the Durbin Process, we encourage your firm involvement in this process.

According to our estimations and public documents from the Colombian government, there are a total of 11 million Afro-Colombians. We live on the Caribbean and Pacific coastlines of Colombia; the valleys of Magdalena, Cauca, Patía and in the largest cities of the country such as Cali, Cartagena, Barranquilla, Medellín, and Bogotá. Apart from constituting a significant number, our participation in the public arena, in politics, and in the distribution of goods and services is minimal.

In 1991, the Colombian Constitution was amended to recognize the ethnic plurality of our country. The Afro-Colombian movement succeeded in achieving the adoption of the "Law for the Black Communities", also known as Law 70 of 1993. Between 1991 and 1993 these grassroots organizations worked to have many of our collective land rights recognized for our communities. The titles of our collective territory, consisting of 5,600,000 hectares were recognized, along with our Community Councils, the administrative authorities of our territories. The Afro-Colombian movement has grown within the past 15 years at the urban and rural levels. It has positioned itself within the national and international political and cultural arena forming solidarity networks. We are

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building on this foundation to achieve greater consolidation and solidarity, which are the guarantees of a better future. Though we have seen progress within these endeavors, the systematic violation of our human rights and the hindered development of our economy,

politics, society and culture, and the equal opportunity to participate in these arenas continue. The armed conflict along with our government's denial to acknowledge the plight of our lands and the historic exclusion and discrimination of our people has prevented the Afro-Colombian population from progressing. Unfortunately, this is the reality of our situation.

The armed conflict in our regions has caused massacres, disappearances, forced displacement, assassinations, bombardments, continuous armed combat, and the expropriation of our collective territories. These actions have created a humanitarian crisis equal to those taking place in Africa. Nearly half of our population is affected by internal displacement in one way or another. Out of the 4 million internally displaced persons in Colombia, 30 % of these are Afro-Colombian. The intensity in which these events are taking place is leading to our extinction. This situation leads us to believe that the Afro-Colombian Diaspora is experiencing an ethnocide. It is our understanding that the cause of this ethnocide is motivated by the simple reason that our communities live in territories rich in biodiversity. Potential economic gain is taken from us for political and geo-strategic purposes; as is the case in Buenaventura, the North of Cauca, Atrato, Magdalena, and Tumaco. We, the Afro-Colombian communities, join our nation in calling for a peaceful political negotiation to the armed conflict. We believe the U.S. government can play an important role in this process that goes beyond military and economic aid.

Our legislative advances include "Prior Consultation", a fundamental right for all Afro-Colombian and Indigenous persons, recognized by Convention 169 of the ILO, which requires the Colombian government to consult with these respective groups before passing laws that may endanger or affect their territorial and environmental rights. Despite this legislation, our national government continues to violate our legal right to prior consultation. Amongst the most recent and serious cases of these violations are extractive mining projects, port expansions, the exploitation of our coastline, the FTA, and the imposition of mono-cultivations such as palm oil or African palm in our territories. The majority of the Community Councils oppose these projects because of their impact on the territorial and cultural integrity of the Afro-Colombian territories. The palm oil projects are particularly problematic for the communities because of the links to paramilitary groups which are responsible for grave human rights violations in addition to violations to their collective territorial rights. Consequently, the U.S. financial support for these palm oil projects through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is an issue we hope to discuss with your government.

As grassroots communities, we are particularly concerned about the pending U.S. Colombia Free Trade Agreement which will not only affect our communities' labor force but will also create great disadvantages for rural Afro-Colombian communities as the agreement it is not designed to assist small businesses and farmers.

The investment regulations included in the FTA do not protect the Afro-Colombian communities but instead are solely created to protect the interest of foreign investment. Unjust competition within the agricultural sector will traumatically increase, affecting a majority of our agricultural production that is already suffering from the armed conflict, without any guarantee of developing an auto-sustainable and competitive production. The population is experiencing vast poverty (84 % of the population is considered poor),

unemployment and lack of basic services that will further exclude the population from participating in the FTA design. Likewise, the agreement does not contain any provisions to improve roads for transportation, communication, commercialization, access to credit or technical assistance, politics, and land development. On the contrary, it provides mechanisms that will increase the economic, social and cultural crisis we live in and perpetrate the historical exclusion and discrimination that have marginalized us from our nation's progress. While Afro-Colombian organizations have formulated proposals for sustainable development projects that should be considered in our country's political economy, the Free Trade Agreement was formulated without considering any of these plans.

Furthermore, the path of the Free Trade Agreement is stained with the blood of Afro-Colombians, indigenous, unionist, community leaders, families, members of the Afro-Colombian Community Councils, professors, and defenders of human rights, all of whom have fought with dignity for a better life that guarantees the sustainability of our natural resources.

Within the framework of Plan Colombia, a policy that has been in effect since the Clinton administration, there have been fumigations of illicit cultivations with glyphosate, a chemical that has been banned from the United States. These fumigations have had a devastating impact on our territories. They have contaminated our potable water supplies, contributed to the degradation of our ecosystem, increased food insecurity, and have also generated the internal displacement of thousands of our brothers and sisters, to whom our government has yet to offer adequate assistance or appropriate reparations. Our communities have autonomous initiatives to manually eradicate coca from our territories, all of which have yet to receive any support from the government. The Colombian government has failed to follow through in cases where agreements have been made between the communities and the government. Our communities have held a radical position of zero tolerance for the presence of illicit cultivation in our collective territories; a position that has been paid for even with our lives. Our commitment is firm but we cannot do it alone.

You and your campaign team have succeeded in reviving the national and global collective conscience based on responsibility that can achieve positive change towards peace and wellbeing. You have emphasized the need to care for not only those close to us, those we love, but also those that are in need, because change is only possible through unity. We understand and share your message. Even though violence has submitted us to another forced migration (similar to that of the colonization of the Americas), with the same consequences such as pillage, social fragmentation, which is destroying our bonds, drowning our offerings, and closing the path we had cleared in the search for a better tomorrow with wellbeing and dignity for our people. We have a responsibility to our history and ancestors whom were forced across the Atlantic and taught us through their daily struggles a message of dedication and solidarity, with a common objective of freedom. They shared your positive message of hope. You can count on us. Can we count on you?

Mr. President, the following points are of our utmost concern with regards to protecting our rights and of which we hope to discuss with your government:

1. The inclusion of Afro-Colombian issues in the bilateral agenda between Colombia and the United States.
2. The imposition of large scale national and international projects that were implemented without prior consultation with our communities and that were implemented through intimidation, internal displacement, assassinations, and the massacring of Afro-Colombians.
3. The current guidelines for the Free Trade Agreement and the politics on the 'War on Drugs'.
4. Programs of cooperation, specifically those implemented through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).
5. Intellectual property.
6. The violations against autonomous development and the right to prior consultation.
7. The forced internal displacement of Afro-Colombian communities and the loss of our collective territories.
8. The participation of the United States government in the political solution to the internal armed conflict and the strengthening of Colombia's democracy and governance.

With the firmness inherited from our ancestors and with hope in your government, we await the opportunity to begin a dialogue that will bring about the progress of our people towards equality and dignity.

We respectfully ask that you respond or direct any questions to Charo Mina Rojas, Association for Internally Displaced Afro-Colombians USA (AFRODES USA) at (434) 760-0663 or saynotofta@renacientes.net.

Respectfully,

1. ACADESAN Consejo Comunitario General Del San Juan
2. ACONUR
3. Afrojuveniles Del Copey "COPE"
4. Afrolibertario
5. ANPAC. Asociación nacional De pescadores artesanales De Colombia
6. Asamblea De Los Resistente Charco - Nariño
7. Asociación Afrosanmartin Del Corregimiento De EL PERRO
8. Asociación Afro Juvenil De La Mata
9. Asociación Campesina Del San Juan "ACADESAN"
10. Asociación Comunidades De Cacarica (CADIVA)
11. Asociación De Comunidades Negras Campesinos y Pescadores "ASCOMPES"
12. Asociación De Comunidades Negras De Boquerón "ACONDEBO"

13. Asociación De Comunidades Negras De Chinela "Leoncio López Bello"
14. Asociación De Comunidades Negras De Costilla
15. Asociación De Comunidades Negras De El Paso "ASOCONEPÁ"
16. Asociación De Comunidades Negras De Guacoche "CARDONAL"
17. Asociación De Comunidades Negras De Guaimaral "Bienvenida Castrillo Cárdenas"
18. Asociación De Comunidades Negras De San Bernardo "SAHAYA"
19. Asociación De Comunidades Negras Las Palmitas "AFRO PAL"
20. Asociación De Consejos Comunitarios De López De Micay
21. Asociación De Consejos Comunitarios De Timbiquí
22. Asociación De Jóvenes Afrodescendientes De Tamalameque
23. Asociación De Jóvenes "Afroariguaní"
24. Asociación De Jóvenes Afroguaymaraleros José David Socarras "VIRRO"
25. Asociación De Jóvenes Negros De San Bernardo "ASJONES"
26. Asociación De Mujeres Afrodescendientes Por La Vida Amav
27. Asociación De Mujeres Afrodescendientes y Del Caribe Graciela Chaines
28. Asociación De Mujeres Municipales De Buenos Aires
29. Asociación De Negros De La Mata "ASONEMA"
30. Asociación De Negros Jóvenes De Costilla "ASOJONECO"
31. Asociación De Negros Unidos Del Río Yurumanguí "APONURY"
32. Asociación De Negritudes De Sabana "ASONESA"
33. Asociación De Organizaciones De Comunidades Negras Del Cesar "KU - SUTO"
34. Asociación De Pescadores Artesanales "ANPAS"
35. Asociación De Pescadores De San Bernardo "ASPESAMBER"
36. Asociación De Productores Agropecuarios, Dulces Y Servicios Etno-Turísticos De Palenque (Asopraduse)
37. Asociación Fraternal De Comunidades Negras De Cajibío - Cauca - AFRANET
38. Asociación Juventud Afrodescendientes De Badillo
39. Asociación Juvenil BENKOS KU SUTO Cartagena
40. Asociación Juvenil KU SUTO Barranquilla
41. Asociación Juvenil KU SUTO Palenque
42. Asociación Kasimba-Cali
43. Asociación Municipal E Comunidades Negras "KIKE ÁVILA"
44. Asociación Para El Desarrollo Juvenil De La Costa Pacífica Juventud 500
45. Asociación Red De Juventudes Del Cesar "REDJUVENSAR"
46. Asociación Titanio - Cali
47. Asociación Zonas Humanitarias y Zonas Biodiversidad De Jiguamiandó, Consejo Comunitario
48. ASOMUTRAP. Asociación de la mujer trabajadora Del litoral Pacífico Buenaventura Valle
49. CEPAC Buenaventura Centro De Pastoral Afrocolombiana
50. Colectivo Local De Jóvenes De Buenaventura
51. Consejo Comunitario Alto Río Iscuande
52. Consejo Comunitario Afrocolombiano De Guaymaral Marcelino Ochoa Almenarez "Catelo"
53. Consejo Comunitario Afrovenadense "Manuel Salvador Suárez Almenarez"
54. Consejo Comunitario Amansa Guapo
55. Consejo Comunitario De Amansaguapo – Bolívar
56. Consejo Comunitario De Aracataca – Magdalena

57. Consejo Comunitario De Arroyo De Piedra. – Cartagena
58. Consejo Comunitario De Badillo "José Prudencio Padilla"
59. Consejo Comunitario De Barú. – Bolívar
60. Consejo Comunitario De Bayunca. – Bolívar
61. Consejo Comunitario De El Perro Carlota Redondo De Álvarez
62. Consejo Comunitario De Guacamayal. – Magdalena
63. Consejo Comunitario De Guacoche "Los Cardonales"
64. Consejo Comunitario De Guacochito "Arcilla, Cardón Y Tuna"
65. Consejo Comunitario De Hatoviejo – Bolívar
66. Consejo Comunitario De Isla Del Rosario – Cartagena
67. Consejo Comunitario De La Haya. – Bolívar
68. Consejo Comunitario De La Plata Bahía Málaga
69. Consejo Comunitario De La Vereda La Gloria
70. Consejo Comunitario De Ladrilleros
71. Consejo Comunitario De Los Venados – Cesar
72. Consejo Comunitario De Luruaco – Atlántico
73. Consejo Comunitario De Orika – Cartagena
74. Consejo Comunitario De Palos Prieto
75. Consejo Comunitario De Pilamos
76. Consejo Comunitario De Pontezuela. – Cartagena
77. Consejo Comunitario De Repelón – Atlántico
78. Consejo Comunitario De Saco – Atlántico
79. Consejo Comunitario De San Cayetano. – San Juan Nepomuceno
80. Consejo Comunitario De Sevilla – Magdalena
81. Consejo Comunitario De Tucurinca – Magdalena.
82. Consejo Comunitario Del Alto y Medio Dagua
83. Consejo Comunitario Del Bajo Mira y Frontera
84. Consejo Comunitario Del Bajo Naya
85. Consejo Comunitario Del Río Cajambre
86. Consejo Comunitario Del Río Calima
87. Consejo Comunitario Del Río Mallorquín
88. Consejo Comunitario Del Río Raposo
89. Consejo Comunitario Del Río Yurumangui
90. Consejo Comunitario General Del San Juan
91. Consejo Comunitario La Alsacia
92. Consejo Comunitario La Toma
93. Consejo Comunitario Mayor Del Patia Grande Sus Brazos y La Ensenada De Tumaco ACAPA
94. Consejo Comunitario Ma Kankamaná De San Basilio De Palenque – Bolívar
95. Consejo Comunitario Mayor Del Río Anchicayá
96. Consejo Comunitario Pasa Caballo
97. Consejo Comunitario Rescate De Nuestros Ancestros Del Río Mejicano
98. Consejo Comunitario Unicosta parte Baja
99. Consejo Comunitario Unión Del Río Changüí
100. Consejo De Mujeres De Buenaventura
101. Corporación Centro De Pastoral Afrocolombiana - CEPAC
102. Corporación Ancestro
103. Corporación Palenque Siglo XXI
104. Empresa Comunitaria Brisas De Agua Blanca.

105. Funda Mojarra Del San Juan
106. Fundación Para El Desarrollo De Las Comunidades Negras "FUNDECOMUNEG"
107. FUNDEMUJER
108. Grupo De Jóvenes De Suárez (ASNAZU)
109. JUBCA Jóvenes Unidos por el Bienestar De Calima
110. JUNTA DE ACCION COMUNAL Barrio el firme parte baja
111. Juventud Simañera Afrodescendiente "JUSIAFRO"
112. Kussuto – Pasacaballo
113. KU MAJANÁ
114. KU - M´GENDE
115. MINGA Por Buenaventura
116. Mina Vieja
117. Oncaproteca
118. Organichar
119. Organización Afrosierra "Bartola Herrera"
120. Organización Afrojuvenil En Busca De Un Buen Futuro
121. Organización Afrosierra "INÉS MEJÍA"
122. Organización Afrojuvenil "Jorge Eliécer Gaitán"
123. Organización De Comunidades Afrodescendientes Del Copey "COPE"
124. Organización De Comunidades Negras "AFROAURORA"
125. Organización De Comunidades Negras De Los Brasiles "SAN MARTIN"
126. Organización De Comunidades Negras De El Paso De Los Adelantados
127. Organización De Comunidades Negras De Camperucho "Ramona Almenarez"
128. Organización De Comunidades Negras "Juan González Mena"
129. Organización De Comunidades Negras "Loma De Calenturas"
130. Organización De Comunidades Negras "Sábanas Del Vallito"
131. Organización De Jóvenes Afrodescendientes "Lomeros En Acción"
132. Organización De Juventudes Afrovenadenses "Yendi Yen Rodríguez"
133. Organización Juvenil De Comunidades Negras "Boca De La Miel Del Vallito"
134. Organización Juvenil De Comunidades Negras De La Aurora "Unidos Por Una Misma Causa"
135. Organización Juvenil De Comunidades Negras "Reimundo Pallares"
136. Organización Sinecio Mina - Puerto Tejada Cauca
137. Palenque Del Alto Cauca
138. Palenque KUSSUTO
139. Palenque Regional El Congal
140. Pastoral Afrocolombiana
141. Proceso De Comunidades Negras - PCN
142. Red De Consejos Comunitarios Del Caribe