

To the Wounaan of Unión Aguas Claras, Chachajo, and Chamapuro:

We write to you today as concerned people of the United States who wish to stand in solidarity with the struggle you have endured since being displaced from your home last November. As the number of internally displaced people in Colombia surpasses six million, we advocate that this is not solely a problem for the Colombian government to remedy, but rather a tragedy that affects all of humankind.

We have stood by you as you denounced the paramilitaries on your land and in the city of Buenaventura who have threatened and confined you. We were struck to see that the place you were intended to see as a refuge was El Cristal, a sports arena with inconsistent running water and indecent places for you to sleep. We watched you mourn the death of two infants in an environment where you are not able to practice your traditional medicine. We felt your desperation as you insisted that the longer you are forced to stay in the arena, the more your children are losing touch with your culture. We watched as your constitutional rights were violated when you were deprived of a culturally appropriate relocation, viable land return, regular delivery of humanitarian aid, and a diet that coincided with the nutrition you had provided for yourselves in your home.

Today we stand with you once again, though tired may be your feet and hoarse may be your voices. We admire your courage and conviction and stand by you as you insist that despite what the local police force says, your homeland is still not safe. The forced displacement in June of fifty of your neighbors from the Papayo reservation is proof of that. We support your application for protective mechanisms for all of your community leaders, especially in the wake of a direct threat received by one leader on August 31 that has gone uninvestigated and unpunished. We support your call to hold broader negotiations with government representatives from the local, regional, and national levels, and maintain that you should receive the funding to cover your leaders' travel costs to Bogotá.

We find it disgraceful that Buenaventura is approaching the one year anniversary of when it told 343 people to sleep on bleachers and the city still has not found a solution. This is the same city that boasts its port which moves 60% of Colombia's commerce. We have denounced this tragedy at the U.S. Embassy and the U.S. State Department. We will keep denouncing the treatment you have received in every channel where we have access so that together we will see change. Whatever happens, we will stand by your side, knowing that if you reach a year of being displaced with a lack of government guarantees, you plan to return to you land independently. We will accompany you until we see your children happily playing along the banks of the San Juan River.

Sincerely,