



Black Communities'
Process in Colombia

Afro-Colombian Women Human Rights Defenders Campaign*

For immediate release

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On International Workers Day – Three dead and forty trapped, a tragedy that could have been prevented

Colombian government fails to protect the rights of artisanal Afro-Colombian miners



The Afro-Colombian Human Rights Defenders Campaign (ACHRD) highlights on International Workers Day another working class tragedy that could have, if the Colombian government would have complied with its responsibility to recognize, protect and fulfill the ancestral community's territorial, cultural and economic rights of Afro-Colombians.

Last night, at 11:00 pm, tons of rocks and mud buried alive dozens of Afro-descendant artisanal miners in a 65 feet-deep hole that killed three and trapped over forty people in an illegal large-scale mining operation called San Antonio, in the village El Arenal, municipality of Santander de Quilichao, department of Cauca, 70 kilometers to the south from the city of Cali.

Since 2009 the Community Councils in the Northern Cauca region have been in constant struggle and confrontation with the Colombian government to defend their territorial rights from the greed of multinational mining corporations like Anglo Gold Ashanti, with interests on the area. The respond of the Colombian authorities has been to criminalize artisanal mining activities, leaving as the only means of source of income for local people to work in dangerous illegal large-scale operations like San Antonio. "Francia Marquez, an Afro-Colombian community leader from an area that practices ancestral mining, states that " This operation has been allowed by the Colombian government, we demand that the government respond immediately to this tragedy and our demand to decriminalize ancestral mining."

"We condemn the Colombian government for failing to shut down large scale illegal mining operations in Norte Del Cauca", added a member of the Black communities Process in Colombia –PCN. Charo Mina-Rojas, coordinator of the Afro-Colombian Women's Human Rights Defender's Project, also stated that, "after criminalizing traditional artisan mining, a practice followed by Afro-Colombian communities in Norte Del Cauca for literally hundreds of years, many of these traditional miners have been

forced to labor in dangerous large scale, and illegal mining operations in order to feed their families.” “The failure of the government to shut-down these operations, many of them owned by wealthy elements from outside of region and perhaps even outside of the country, and by criminalizing methods in which Afro-Colombian communities have subsisted ancestrally, the tragedy that we have witness over the last 24 hours lays right at the feet of the Colombian government,” said Mina-Rojas.

The Afro-Colombian Human Rights Defenders Campaign demand: 1) that the local, regional and national authorities respond adequately not only to the immediate rescue operations but to ensure comprehensive assistance and reparation to the victims and their families; 2) that the Ministry of Mines, Ingeominas and the Ministry of Interior respond immediately to the agreements reached with the communities last year, agreements that could secure dignifying working condition for the Afro-descendant communities in their own artisanal and sustainable mining environments.

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* Afro-Colombian Human Rights Defenders Campaign (ACHRD) responds to the need to raise awareness and build accountability regarding the increasing targeted violence and political persecution of Afro-Colombian human rights defenders and to expose the egregious human rights situation in Afro-Colombian communities. <http://www.afrocolombianhr.org/index.html>