

Gentlemen:

7th Forum on Minority Issues

Intervention of Dr. Luis Ernesto Olave – Coordinator for People of African Descent of the Latin American and Caribbean Network for Democracy (REDLAD)

Respected members of this forum, on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Network for Democracy (REDLAD), an organization that brings together over 520 NGOs in our region, I have come to talk to you, along with my colleague Hernando Viveros, about the situation of People of African Descent in Latin America and the Caribbean, with an emphasis on the situation of violence that we Afro-Colombians live in Colombia:

We would like to begin by reminding you that after January 1, 2015, the International Decade for People of African Descent approved by the UN General Assembly begins and which, through the advocacy of RedLad and other organizations, was also adopted by the General Assembly of the OAS. Today, however, it is threatened because the States have not conferred upon this decade the status it deserves, to the extent that the Member States of the UN have not wanted to recognize the importance of creating the “Permanent Forum for African Descendants” within the United Nations; a place where we could continually interact to find mechanisms that would allow us to work together against racism, the exclusion and violence to which our communities are subjugated, which also carry with them the legacy of 500 years of slavery.

In the specific case of Colombia, due to the non-application of international norms in benefit of minorities, the peace process has excluded ethnic groups. The peace process is unaware of the problems that armed conflict has generated in the Afro-Colombian territories and we actually currently live in the middle of continued violence due to the fault of all actors in the conflict; whether it is the guerrillas, paramilitaries or even the public forces, they are responsible for making our community the most displaced and poor. As an example, I bring three current cases:

- **In Buenaventura:** Houses of chopping/casas de pique still operate (These are places where persons belonging to our community are mutilated or dismembered.)
- **In Tumaco:** Just a few days ago, they used a young Afro-Colombian as a suicide bomber making him take a package to the installations of the public force where it was detonated.
- **In the Department of Choco:** The violence occurs in the rivers due to illegal mining, carried out by guerrilla groups and paramilitaries, because extracting gold from our territories has become more profitable than cultivating drugs.

The preceding situations have created a new form of slavery, through the intimidation and assassination of all those who oppose their interests. For example, **for reporting this in Choco, I myself have been the victim of an assassination attempt and continued threats**, but the government has not been willing to assume a serious posture to protect my life or that of other Afro-Colombian leaders who are defending our rights.

To conclude, I would like to report that as a group of Afro-Colombians, we have been persecuted by a political group directed by the ex-Congressman Yahir Acuña, who is being investigated for having connections with paramilitaries and some drug traffickers of the Cauca Valley. He would like to usurp the only two exclusive seats that the Congress of the Republic of Colombia has for Afro-Colombians, by wanting to install in these seats two persons with no African heritage. Given this situation, and along with other leaders, we lodged a guardianship action to prevent their illegal possession, but this has placed our lives at risk.

Given this situation and in the framework of the new dynamics of the Civil Society of People of African Descent, from REDLAD, we call upon the United Nations to approve the Permanent Forum for African Descendants. We call upon the Colombian Government to include Afro-Colombians in the Peace Process and for it to respect our political rights and to protect the lives of those who are defending such rights.

Thank you very much.