



Fian International, Friends of the Earth International and La Via Campesina condemn the forced eviction of the community of Las Pavas

27/07/2009. – FIAN International, Friends of the Earth International and La Via Campesina condemn the forced eviction that occurred on July 14, 2009 of 120 families settled in the rural area known as Las Pavas, located in the Buenos Aires district, jurisdiction of the municipality of El Peñón, in the South of the Bolivar province. Members of the National Police and the Anti-riot Mobile Squad entered into the community's settlement at approximately 1:00 pm and destroyed 7 peasant family dwellings, looted their belongings, and proceeded to evacuate 120 families, in which included numerous pregnant women and approximately 100 children, some of whom had just been born.

With this forced eviction, ordered irregularly by the Police Inspector of the Peñón municipality, the members of the community were once again victims of forced displacement, similar to what happened in the year 2003 as a result of paramilitary groups. The eviction order was solicited by the palm growing companies APORTES SAN ISIDRO S.A. and C.I. TEQUENDAMA, who claim to be the owners of the land. The companies' lawyers were present during the eviction.

However, the families have been in possession of these lands developing economic activities and carrying out improvements to optimize the agricultural output of the land since 1997 when the owner of the land abandoned them. In accordance with Article 52 of Law 160 of 1994, regarding the recovery of uncultivated lands, the peasant families in the Association of Cacao Growers of Buenos Aires (ASOCAB) solicited the Intervention of the Colombian Institute for Rural Development (INCODER) to recover the approximately 1.235,5 hectares of land. The National Land Unit (UNAT) issued the Resolution 1473 of 2008 from November 11, 2008, which started the administrative proceedings that aim at establishing whether to extinguish or not the right to private ownership of the former owner to the designated rural areas, Las Pavas, Peñaloza and Si Dios Quiere, whose proceedings are in the notification stage. The Colombian law (Article 5, decree 747 of 1992) prohibits the ordering of the eviction of peasants in areas with this condition. General Comment 7 of the UN Committee of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights says that the forced evictions are prima facie incompatible with the requirements of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, of which Colombia is a State Party.

Representatives of Friends of the Earth International, of FIAN International and of La Via Campesina visited the evicted families at the beginning of July in the course of an international mission to verify the impacts of agrofuels in the rural population. FIAN International, Friends of the Earth International and La Via Campesina urge the Colombian government to guarantee the immediate return of the displaced families to their settlement and to speed up the proceedings aimed at clarifying the status of the land and at giving secure access to land to the families. Similarly, they urge the government to compensate the families for the destruction of their homes and for the damages caused by the members of the police during the eviction; and to immediately assist the displaced families, especially children, pregnant women, and the elderly.