

Open letter to the ELN to reaffirm our SOS of 22 June 2018

With this open letter, we, the *Consejo Comunitario Mayor de la Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato* (Higher Community Council of the Integrated Peasant Farmer Association of the River Atrato - COCOMACIA), the Association of the Indigenous Chapters of the Embera, Katío, Chamí and Tule of Chocó (ASOREWA) and the Commission for Life, Justice and Peace of the Diocese of Quibdó, call upon all entities of the ELN, with the objective of reaffirming our SOS from 22 June 2018.

For the last weeks, we have been waiting for a public apology from the ELN commanders, for the senseless and offensive statement made by the commander Uriel, which we perceived as emotional and impulsive reaction. We could not believe that the statement made by this commander could be the official position of the ELN as an organisation.

More than a year ago, the ethnic authorities of Chocó submitted a proposal called "[Acuerdo Humanitario Ya!](#)", as a contribution to the construction of peace and to finding a solution to the serious humanitarian crisis that our communities are living through as a result of the actions of armed groups. Today we are surprised to see the delegitimising remarks about our clear positions to defend the life of the people. The processes we represent are legitimate and authentic and have led to achievements in relation to human rights in Colombia. Therefore, we reject the words of the commander Uriel, which contribute to the weakening of organisational structures, just like bullets and bombs.

As legitimate ethnic authorities that were constituted and elected in autonomous, participative spaces, we would like to express the following with regard to your public statement called "Important declarations for the Medio Atrato" from 22 June 2018:

1. We are not in a position to determine if alias La Mona has authority of command within the ELN structure, but we are sure that he acts on behalf of the ELN in this region. It seems very odd that the ELN is not aware of La Mona being part of its ranks. We have seen him in the region, taking actions on behalf of the ELN, including murders, threats, verbal aggressions towards communities and social leaders. You have acknowledged this and assumed responsibility for the harm caused by him.
2. Although you try to restrict our communication, we are in permanent contact with the affected communities. Our SOS was a response to the constant cries for help from our peoples, who are overwhelmed and are not able to endure any more abusive and intimidatory treatment.
3. We know that in the midst of the chaos, some afro-Colombian and indigenous communities have had to assume the role of mediators to avoid more bloodshed and displacements. They call for respect for life, an end of recruitment and extortion, and

that free movement is not restricted by the installation of landmines. All these demands are in the proposal we made in the Acuerdo Humanitario Ya! and are part of international humanitarian law.

4. We reiterate that the leadership in the area has focused on humanitarian relief and has contributed to saving lives. The modus operandi and the rhetoric of the ELN in this zone starts with the word “kill” and ends with the word “kill”. The levels of aggression are very high. They cannot allege that the issues have been solved when the attacks against our communities and authorities are escalating. Several ethnic authorities, leaders and teachers keep receiving death threats, aggressions, intimidation and retaliation by units of the ELN that operate in the Medio Atrato.
5. The disrespect that you show towards ethnic authorities and the reckless statements, alleging that you are making agreements with the communities, puts them at risk. You should mitigate this harm. If not, you will be responsible for the dangers that could emerge as a consequence of your inappropriate and inaccurate statement.
6. For more than 30 years, we have maintained a political position in coordination with all communities which prohibits the presence of armed actors in our territories and the involvement of civil society [in the conflict]. We have suffered from the ruthlessness of the war and we do not want to continue suffering. The only struggle that has led to results for us is the one we fight peacefully; thanks to the collective and joint effort, we have managed to get titles for the peoples of the region.
7. Finally, we urge you to overcome any internal difficulties so that our fair demands, which we have reiterated here, can be addressed and solved. At the same time, we hope that the Peace Talks in Havana will continue and will lead to the results that we, the majority of the Colombian people, need so urgently: to achieve peace and live better in our territories.

Consejo Comunitario Mayor de la Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato (COCOMACIA),

Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas Embera, Katío, Chamí y Tule del Departamento del Chocó (ASOREWA),

Federación de Asociaciones de Cabildos Indígenas del Departamento del Chocó (FEDEOREWA)

Comisión Vida, Justicia y Paz de la Diócesis de Quibdó

Quibdó, 7 July 2018