

News Statement
Urgent Action

**CROPS AFFECTED BY FUMIGATION WITH
HERBICIDE GLYPHOSATE BY THE
ANTINARCOTICS BRANCH OF THE
NATIONAL POLICE
MAY 23 2013**

The Denomination of the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church in Chocó is an independent non-profit religious entity with a history of more than 65 years in the Department of Chocó on Colombia's west coast. It is an organization with legal status in accordance with the Colombian Ministry of the Interior and Department of Justice, Resolution 2019 from October 7, 1997, tax registration number 818000565 under the local branch of the Chocó Department of Taxes and Customs (DIAN). The mission of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Chocó is the proclamation of an integral Gospel message, through word and deed, meeting the spiritual and physical needs of all people in order to glorify God.

The Church supports various rural and community development projects in the region through support and cooperation of Mennonite Central Committee, Mencoldes (Mennonite Development Foundation of Colombia), Justapaz (Christian Mennonite Association for Justice, Peace and Non-Violence), CEAS (Ecumenical Action Group for Psycho-Social and Trauma Healing). One of the projects is an agricultural project to grow and process rice as well as to harvest cacao plants (to make chocolate) in municipalities and communities along the San Juan River basin of Chocó, including Istmina, Novita, Condoto, the Panamerican Union and MedioBaudo.

In all of the projects of the Mennonite Brethren Church in this region the principle objective is to improve quality of life for those within these rural communities of Chocó and, while seeking to stabilize the local social economy in order that people no longer have to participate in the growing of illicit crops, such as coca, for their survival. These agricultural projects seek to open up opportunities for growing alternative and legal crops, with the hope that community members abandon practices of growing coca.

To date, these projects have had a significant impact in these communities. More than 200 families have become involved in the activities of the project, participating in the cultivation of legal crops. The church is very satisfied by the response and participation of the communities.

For this reason, we are extremely upset and saddened by what has happened. The Government of Colombia, through the Antinarcotics wing of the National Police Department has once again led activities to eradicate, by air, illicit crops with the herbicide, Glyphosate. This recent action spraying and fumigation of crops took place indiscriminately throughout the region without even previously consulting communities, essentially killing the hopes and dreams of these farmers as many rice crops, cacao plants were completely destroyed. This latest devastation comes on top of communities and a region as a whole that, especially in the last few years, have already suffered severe levels of violence, abandonment of the State and armed conflict.

These communities had put so much effort into this project, with the motivation of improving their circumstances and communities in general and this destruction of their efforts and crops and the way it was done was incredibly irresponsible. And what makes it worse is that in addition the fumigation was not just of legal crops, the fumigation hit the villages and their sources of water and rivers. This could potentially be fatal for people who use these water sources. None of the communities in the region have potable water, and only consume rain water that they collect.

Petition/Request

In light of this severe material, physiological and moral damage caused within the communities and within the Mennonite Brethren Churches, who have been behind these development projects, we are asking for support from Colombian and International Organizations, the Anabaptist and other partner churches of Colombia and around the world and other relevant organizations as we seek to defend our human rights in response to these violations on the part of the Ministry of Defense and the National Police.

Our Concrete Petitions and Requests:

1. Reparation of land and compensation to all of the families within our program who were impacted by the damage done to the crops of rice and cacao as a result of the spraying of the herbicide, glyphosate.

2. Restoration and cleaning up of the environment contaminated by this herbicide and toxin, including sources of water and rivers, and the restoration of flora and fauna within the zone affected by glyphosate.
3. The immediate suspension of this practice of aerial fumigation with glyphosate. The Government of Colombia has many other ways and methods to eradicate illicit crops without impacting and potentially damaging the environment and with minimal impacts on legal crops.

In addition, here is a list of some of the people who have been affected, listed by community. They can be contacted if you would like to arrange a visit to see their land.

Chaquí (Corregimiento), Istmina

José Delio Iburgüen y Luz Nidian Acevedo: They are harvesting their rice prematurely with the hope that they will be able to salvage at least part of their harvest that was affected by this recent aerial fumigation. This is definitely a risk to their health.

Calle Fuerte, Medio San Juan

Institución Educativa Joaquín Urrutia (a school) – Sede Calle Fuerte: The crops of rice located behind the school, planted about a month and a half ago by the students were fumigated on Friday, May 10, 2013, despite being in an inhabited area.

María Elvira Salazar: This woman is single mother and had spent hours in the hot sun working in artisanal mining in order to pay workers to plant rice on her land. Now she is at the point where she is about to lose everything because the crop is dying as a result of the fumigation. It is important to note that this particular crop was on a river bank and far away from any illicit crops.

Dipurdú de los indios, Medio San Juan

Manuel Manyoma: His crop is located about five minutes from town beside the Banks of the Dipurdú de los Indios creek. These crops were fumigated around 11:00am on Friday, May 10, 2013.

Juan Antonio Asprilla y Jesús María Hurtado: Their crops of rice was ready for harvest, but due to the fumigation, it dried out and now there is no hope that they will be able to harvest it.

Paimadó

Juan Carlos Bonilla: This crop is located in a sector called “La Rancho” at the

banks of the river and just in front of the district Paimadó. This rice was ready for harvest but due to the fumigation, it dried out and now there is no hope that they will be able to harvest it.

Juan Andrés Sánchez: This crop was also located in the sector called “La Ranca.” It took two days to ready the soil with a backhoe and a subsequent 32 days to plant rice and yucca. The plants were approximately 2 months old when they were fumigated. Now the rice plants are dried out. Before the fumigation he had planned to plant cacao as well, but now the soil has been contaminated by glyphosate.

Félix Aparicio Hurtado: His crops were located near the town and there were no indications that any illicit crops were planted or growing anywhere in the area around his crops.

Fanny Valencia: Her crop of rice was planted by the efforts of her and her children in order to sustain their family, but now they are in danger of losing the entire crop as a result of the fumigation. Her land is located inside the town.

Gilberto Marcelino: He manually eradicated illicit crops in order to replace them with legal crops like cacao, yucca and fruit. However, the cacao plants (two and a half months old) were totally destroyed by the glyphosate.